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THE

TRAGEDIES

OF

VITTORIO ALFIERI;

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN,

BY

CHARLES LLOYD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND
BROWN, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1815.

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DEDICATORY SONNET.

TO

ROBERT SOUTHEY, ESQ.

POET-LAUREATE,

And Honorary Member of the Royal Spanish Academy.

To none of all the friends with whom kind heaven
Has blest my lot, more, SOUTHEY, than to thee
Can I ascribe the wish t' excite in me
Trust, that somewhat to my soul was given
Of power, which with due culture might have thriven.
My youthful feelings, vowed to poesy,
In thee a sponsor found who willingly
Didst promise *that* for which I had but striven.
Imperfect token of entire esteem,
A branch dissever'd from its parent root,
Now I present to thee : and may'st thou deem
That the plant bears in this its foreign shoot,
Withdrawn from Italy's more fervent beam,
In Britain, undeteriorated fruit.

CHARLES LLOYD.

BRATHAY,
13th October, 1814.



Dedication, by Vittorio Alfieri, to

ANTIGONE.

TO

FRANCESCO GORI GANDELLINI,

CITIZEN OF SIENNA.

It is not possible for you to make an excursion hither, to see Antigone represented; Antigone therefore comes to find you: and I hope that this will redound to my better advantage, since, in reading the tragedy, you will see many things clearly, which perhaps might have escaped you in the representation. Hence, from your consummate judgment, I flatter myself to obtain (if I indeed deserve it) praise unadulterated by adulation; and blame, which will be my due in greater abundance, unadulterated by malice.

Be pleased, nevertheless, to accept this proof of my friendship; small compared to my esteem and love for you, but the greatest however that I can demonstrate towards you.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

ROME,
8th December, 1782.

Dedication, by Vittorio Alfieri, to

TIMOLEON.

TO

THE MOST NOBLE PASCAL DE PAOLI,

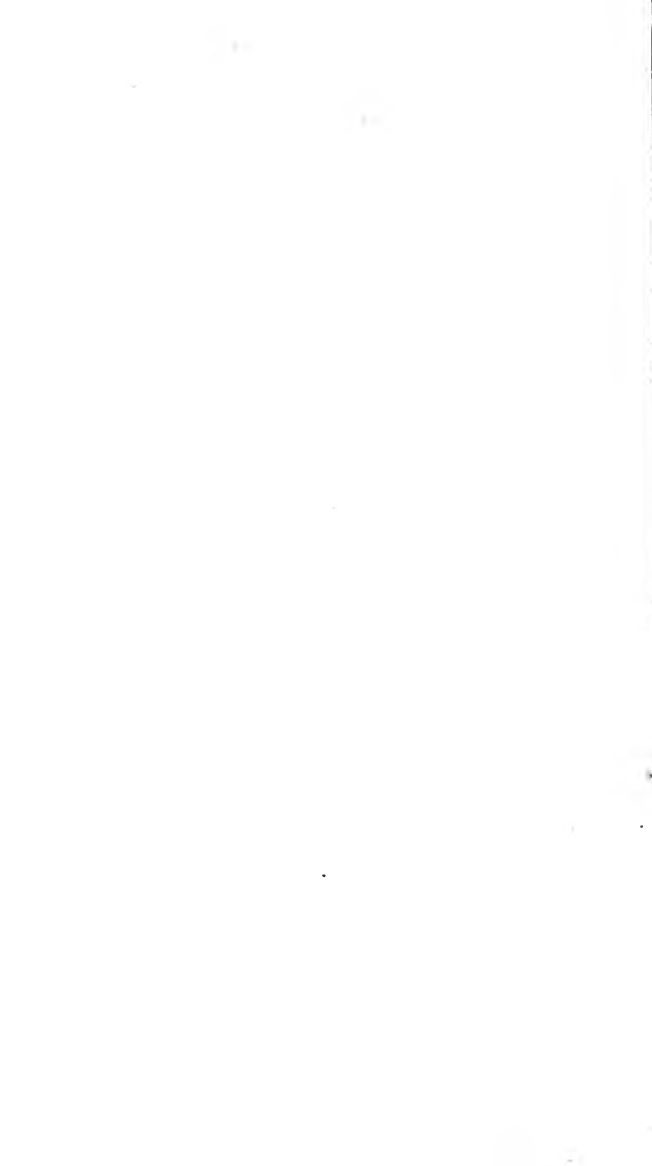
The magnanimous Defender of the Corsicans.

PERHAPS it may appear with reason a mere fatuity to him who only sees present things, to write tragedies on liberty in the language of a people not free. But he, peradventure, will not thus judge, who prognosticates the future from the perpetual vicissitudes of the past.

I, on this account, dedicate this my tragedy to you, as to one of those very few, who, having a very correct idea of other times, of other people, and of other principles, would have been hence worthy to have been born, and to have acted, in an age somewhat less effeminate than our own. But as certainly it has not rested with you, that your country was not restored to liberty, not judging myself (as the multitude is accustomed to do) men from their fortune, but exclusively from their actions, I deem you fully worthy to hear the sentiments of Timoleon, as one that can fully feel and understand them.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

PARIS,
20th September, 1788.



Dedication, by Vittorio Alfieri, to

MEROPE.

TO THE

COUNTESS MONICA TOURNON ALFIERI.

A TRAGEDY of mine, which has for its basis maternal love, belongs to you, my most beloved mother.

You can judge with accuracy whether I have known how to paint that sublime and pathetic affection which you have so often felt ; and principally on that fatal day in which you were by death robbed of another son, my elder brother.

I have yet before my eyes the expression of your genuine and profound grief, which in every gesture of yours transpired with so much intensity : and though I was then in my most tender age, I have still in my heart those words of yours, which were few and simple, but true and terrible : “ Who has taken my son from me ? Ah ! I loved him too much : I shall never see him again ! ” and others of the same sort, with which, as much as I could, I have enriched my Merope. Fortunate am I, if I have in part expressed that

which you so warmly felt, and which I, grieved with your grief, have so vividly retained in my mind.

Although, from my fatal circumstances, I have passed the greater part of my days at a distance from her, I still always preserve for my most beloved mother a lively esteem, respect, and infinite love; of which I give her a most slight proof in dedicating to her this tragedy of mine: but great will be my recompense in exchange, if she give me an assurance of having derived pleasure from it.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

SIENNA,
27th August, 1783.

Dedication, by Vittorio Alfieri, to
 THE
CONSPIRACY OF THE PAZZI.

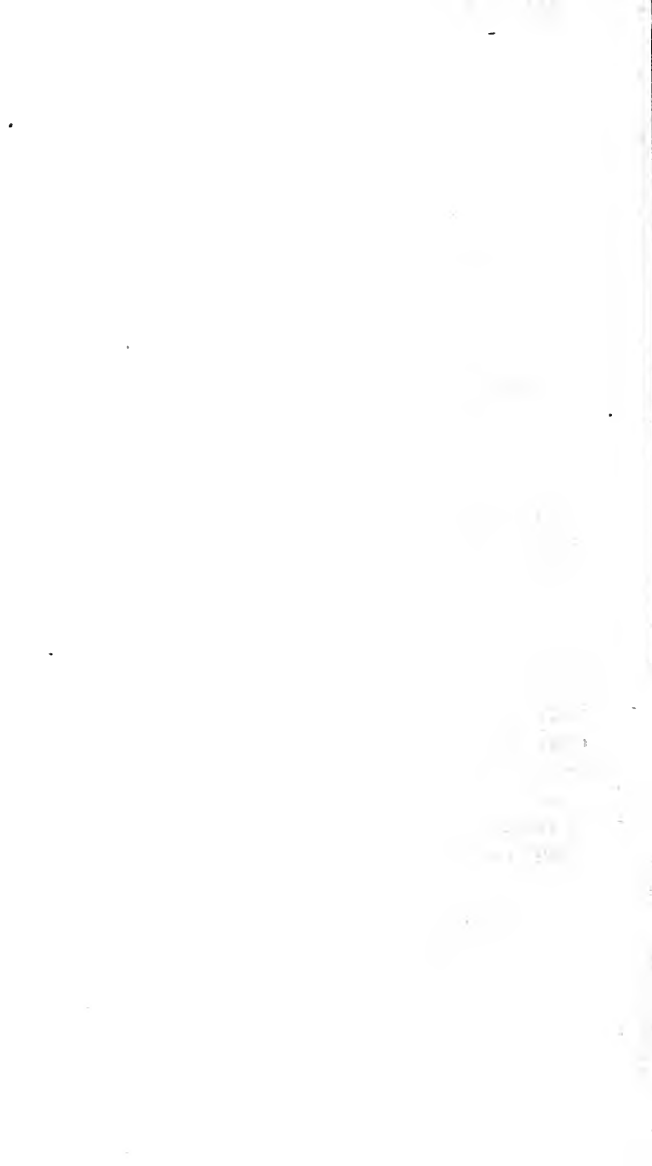
TO THE FRIEND OF MY HEART,
FRANCESCO GORI GANDELLINI,
Citizen of Sienna, dead.

BELOVED and adored shade of the best, of the only true and warm friend that I ever had, or ever shall have, I dedicate to thee this tragedy, far less mine than thine; since it contains nothing but the quintessence (perhaps weakly, but truly expressed) of thy strong and sublime sentiments. Destined to thee while alive, I dared not, notwithstanding, dedicate it to thee, because the receiving it might be imputed to thee as a crime.

To thy happy shade, which, leaving me in tears, smiles at all frivolous worldly animosities, I now then dedicate it securely.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

PARIS,
 20th December, 1787.



Dedication, by Vittorio Alfieri, to
SAUL.

TO THE NOBLE THE LORD ABBOT,
 THOMAS VALPERGA OF CALUSO.

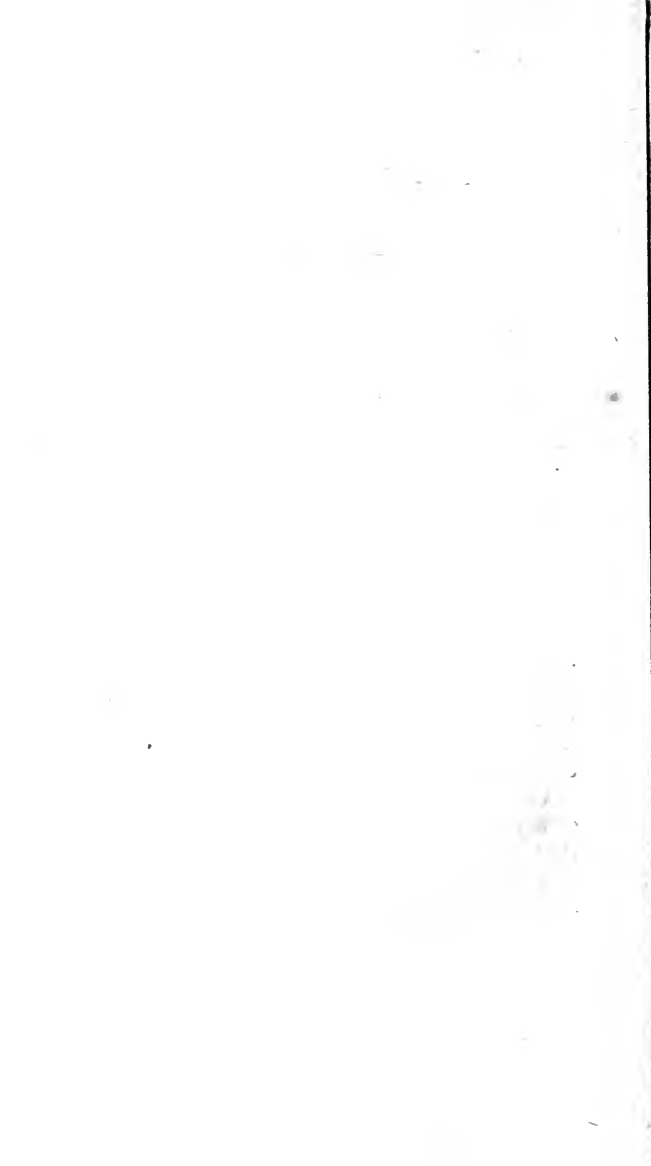
SINCE death has deprived me of the incomparable Francesco Gori, whom you well knew, no other friend of my heart remains to me except yourself.

Hence I should not have seemed to myself, as far as I was able, to have perfectly completed this tragedy, with which, perhaps irrationally, I am singularly pleased, if it did not bear in its title-page your most beloved name. I dedicate it therefore to you, and so much the more with a willing heart, as yourself, learned in many other sciences, are known by all to be most thoroughly so in the sacred writings, which, from your profound knowledge of the Hebrew tongue, you imbibe at the fountain head.

On this account Saul, more than any other of my tragedies, belongs to you. I do not doubt, that, in consideration of our friendship, you will accept it with a good grace: I ardently desire that you may esteem it worthy of you.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

TRENT,
 27th October, 1784.



Dedication, by Vittorio Alfieri, to

AGIS.

TO

THE MOST SACRED
MAJESTY OF CHARLES THE FIRST,

King of Great Britain, &c.

It seems to me that I may dedicate my Agis without meanness or arrogance to an unfortunate and dead king.

As you received your death from the sentence of an unjust parliament, this king of Sparta received his by a similar one of the ephori. But just as the effects were similar, so far were the causes different. Agis, by re-establishing equality and liberty, wished to restore to Sparta her virtue and her splendour ; hence he died full of glory, leaving behind him an everlasting fame. You, by attempting to violate all limits to your authority, falsely wished to procure your own private good : hence nothing remains of you ; and the ineffectual compassion of others alone accompanies you to the tomb.

The designs of Agis, generous and sublime, were afterwards happily prosecuted, and with

much glory to himself, by Cleomenes, his successor, who found the whole prepared. Your designs, common to the herd of monarchs, were, and are, perpetually attempted by many other princes, and also carried into effect, but uniformly without fame. In my opinion, one can in no way make a tragedy of your tragical death, the cause of it not being sublime: I should always have thought, even if I had not attempted to do it, that from the death of Agis, the true grandeur of the Spartan king being considered, a noble tragedy might have been constructed.

Both the one and the other were, and will be, a memorable example to the people, and a terrible one to kings; but with this remarkable difference between them, that many others have been, and will be, like to that of your majesty, but never one like to that of Agis.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

MARTINSBURGH,
9th May, 1786.

Dedication, by Vittorio Alfieri, to
THE FIRST BRUTUS.

TO
THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND FREE CITIZEN,
GENERAL WASHINGTON.

THE name of the deliverer of America alone can stand in the title-page of the tragedy of the deliverer of Rome.

To you, excellent and most rare citizen, I therefore dedicate this ; without first hinting at even a part of the so many praises due to yourself, which I now deem all comprehended in the sole mention of your name. Nor can this my slight allusion appear to you contaminated by adulation ; since, not knowing you by person, and living disjoined from you by the immense ocean, we have but too emphatically nothing in common between us but the love of glory. Happy are you, who have been able to build your glory on the sublime and eternal basis of love to your country, demonstrated by actions. I, though not born free, yet having abandoned in time my Lares, and for no other reason than

that I might be able to write loftily of liberty, I hope by this means at least to have proved what might have been my love for my country, if I had indeed fortunately belonged to one that deserved the name. In this single respect, I do not think myself wholly unworthy to mingle my name with yours.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

PARIS,
31st December, 1788.

Dedication, by Vittorio Alfieri, to

THE SECOND BRUTUS.

TO

THE FUTURE PEOPLE OF ITALY.

I HOPE that I shall be pardoned the insult by you, oh generous and free Italians, that I innocently offered to your grandfathers, or great-grandfathers, in presuming to present to them the two Brutuses, tragedies in which, instead of ladies, interlocutors, and actors, the people was introduced among many most lofty personages.

I also acutely feel how enormous the offence was to attribute tongue, hand, and intellect to those who (from having entirely forgotten that they themselves had ever received these gifts from nature) thought it almost impossible that their successors should ever reacquire them.

“ But if my words are destined to be seeds, which fructify in honour, to those whom I arouse from death,” I flatter myself that perhaps justice will be repaid me by you, and not dissevered from some praise. Indeed I am certain, that if,

on this account, I received blame from your ancestors, it would not however be exempted totally from esteem; since all could never hate and despise him whom no individual hated, and who manifestly constrained himself (as far as was in his power) to benefit all, or at least the majority.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

PARIS,
17th January, 1789.

P R E F A C E.

IN the spring of 1813, I began to translate Alfieri, in consequence of the suggestion of a friend whose judgment I highly respect. He remarked, that his tragedies were deemed masterpieces in the language in which they were written ; that they held the first rank in the dramatic literature of Italy ; that the *Life of Alfieri*, written by himself, and translated into English, had been very generally circulated, and had excited much attention ; and, lastly, that no translation of these plays, which, from the abovementioned reasons, seemed so likely to excite the attention of the British public, had hitherto appeared.

I, therefore, addressed myself to the task. How far my powers are equal to doing justice to the original, I must leave to others to decide ;

but it may not be irrelevant here to remark, that, in the course of the translation, I endeavoured merely, as far as I could, to catch perspicuously the general meaning of Alfieri, without at all binding myself down to a literal, word-for-word translation, or to a close imitation of his style.

Indeed, the style of Alfieri is so laconic, and so austere, abounds so little in images, similies, or any ornamental redundancies, that I doubt how far a translation in blank verse in our language, closely imitating the original, would have been acceptable to the English reader.

The Italian language is so eminently "soft and clear," that no austerity of style can rob it of the power of fascination for which it is indebted to the exquisite melody of its sounds. This is not the case with the English language; and I am inclined to think that blank verse constructed in our tongue upon a model as severe as that of Alfieri, would be generally deemed harsh and unpoetical. As far as I have indulged in inversions, my language is like that of the original. An inverted style of speaking is natural to a person in a state of strong emotion, in which state tragedy usually presents characters. When much excited, we express that part of the subject which is uppermost in our minds, without attending to logical order; we neglect those nice gradations which prepare the mind

of the hearer for, and usher in, our meaning. We plunge at once into the subject matter of our discourse, and bring up the rear of it as well as we can, occasionally not without some disarray of after words, at least as respects an exact order of grammatical sequence, and sometimes even to the detriment of philological perspicuity. Alfieri says, in a letter to one of his friends, that a style fit for tragedy is principally obtained by avoiding the ordinary collocation¹ of words.

On many accounts I submit this translation with much diffidence to the public. The greater part of it has been executed when a state of ill health, and much suffering, made it difficult for me to execute any thing at all. I do not offer this by way of apology, for it was at my option to print or not ; but I mention it as an *explanation*, if at times my language may have fallen beneath that level of correctness and perspicuity, which, doubtless, it would have been my ambition to have attained.

It remains for me to say a few words of the

¹ “ Questo mezza, creda a me, signor Ranieri, che oramai molte tragedie tro scritte, si ottiene principalmente dalla non commune collocazione delle parole.”—See answer of Alfieri to the letter of the Signor Ranieri de Calabigi.

character of Alfieri's compositions. Energy and precision are the great characteristics of his manner. There is little sensibility, and still less imagination, displayed in his works. There are few particular passages, which, as in the plays of Shakspeare, and others of our great dramatic writers, forcibly arrest the reader's attention. The effect of his plays may be compared to that of a character who never excites astonishment by any brilliant, transcendent, or sublime action, but who, by keeping the ordinary tenor of his conduct to a pitch of uniform dignity, produces, on the whole, an impression of deep respect. Alfieri's plays are all austere. The characters, though they talk very much of the circumstances in which they are placed, and indeed talk of nothing else, do not go into any analysis of their feelings ; there is nothing like the refinement of sentimental, or the metaphysic of imaginative passion among them ; but, on the other hand, they are often placed in situations, which, if the plays were brought forward on the stage, would allow to accomplished actors considerable scope for the developement of a deeper and wider-extended range of passion, than, in their composition, is given utterance to in words.

The impression which Madame de Staël has received from these tragedies is so similar to my own, that I cannot deny myself the gratification of making use of her language upon this occasion.

“¹ Alfieri, par un hazard singulier, était, pour ainsi dire, transplanté de l'antiquité dans les temps modernes; il était né pour agir, et il n'a pu qu'écrire; son style, et ses tragédies, se ressentent de cette contrainte. Il a voulu marcher par la littérature à un but politique: ce but était le plus noble de tous sans doute; mais n'importe, rien ne dénature les ouvrages d'imagination comme d'en avoir un. Alfieri, impatienté de vivre au milieu d'une nation où l'on rencontroit de savans très erudits et quelques hommes très éclairés, mais dont les littérateurs et les lecteurs ne s'interressoient pour la plupart à rien de sérieux, et se plaisoient uniquement dans les contes, dans les nouvelles, dans les madrigaux; Alfieri, dis-je, a voulu donner à ses tragédies le caractère le plus austere. Il en a retranché les confidens, les coups de théâtre, tout, hors l'interet du dialogue. Il sembloit qu'il voulût ainsi faire pénitence aux Italiens de leur vivacité et de leur imagination naturelle; il a pourtant été fort admiré, parce qu'il est vraiment grand par son caractère, et par son âme, et parce que les habitans de Rome surtout applaudissent aux louanges données aux actions et aux sentimens des anciens Romains, comme

¹ Corinne, 1ere. vol. p. 348.

si cela les regardait encore. Ils sont amateurs de l'énergie, et de l'indépendance, comme des beaux tableaux qu'ils possèdent dans leurs galeries. Mais il n'en est pas moins vrai qu' Alfieri n'a pas créé ce qu'on pourroit appeler un théâtre Italien, c'est-à-dire des tragédies dans lesquelles on trouvât un mérite particulier à l'Italie. Et même il n'a pas caractérisé les mœurs des pays et des siècles qu'il a peints. Sa conjuration des Pazzi, Virginie, Philippe Seconde, sont admirables par l'élévation et la force des idées, mais on y voit toujours l'enpreinte d'Alfieri, et non celle des nations et des temps qu'il met en scène. Bien que l'esprit françois et celui d'Alfieri n'aient pas la moindre analogie, ils se ressemblent en ceci que tous les deux font porter leurs propres couleurs à tous les sujets qu'ils traitent."

It is not usual to point out the defects of an author which one desires to be instrumental in introducing to the notice of the public ; but I can scarcely refrain from remarking, that Alfieri would have been a much greater dramatic writer, if the objects which he had chosen for the excitement of the passions of his heroes and heroines had not almost all of them been of a palpable and material cast. With the struggles of conscience ; with the most exalted of all our feelings, the devotional ones ; with those hidden

mysteries, and invisible sources of sublimity, "which have their full residence in the heart of man, and are partially shadowed forth in the actions and sufferings of the greatest minds;" in short, with all that cannot be disappointed or rewarded on earth, Alfieri seems wholly unacquainted.

His *Saul*, perhaps, and his *Antigone*, form the most striking exceptions to this remark. But those who have been accustomed to travel with Shakspeare through the pathless regions of human passion and human thought, will find in reading these tragedies a sense of baldness, a feeling of want, perpetually forced upon their minds.

The soul of Alfieri was of the first order, but, as Madame de Staël justly observes, he seemed rather born for action than for thought.² His

¹ See "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived in the Time of Shakspeare, by Charles Lamb."

² A female friend of great discernment remarked, when, in reading this preface to her, I came to this passage, that the observation was not warranted by the fact; since Alfieri was always inconsistent, and often almost despicable in his pursuits. But he had no sphere for action in the only way in which his cast of character could have exhibited itself. His own qualities, like those of his dramatic characters, seemed all made for this world; and there is great reason to believe, had he been placed in circumstances favourable to such a test, that he would willingly have

characters are influenced by lofty motives, if those motives are compared with the standard of those which generally actuate human beings, but if compared with the loftier standard of conceivable human sublimity (if I may be so allowed to use the term) in vice or virtue; of that sublimity which is bedded rather in the invisible than visible world; as that sublimity is represented to us in the spiritual beings of Milton, and above all in his Satan; and in many of the plays of Shakspeare, such as Hamlet, Macbeth, &c. &c. they certainly, if "weighed in the balance, will be found wanting."

Finally, like the characters of Richardson, though in a very different way, they talk of nothing but of themselves, and of each other, and the circumstances in which they are placed. The exterior circumstance gives the form to the

proved a martyr to his high feelings of patriotism. In short, the characters which he has chosen to pourtray were rather distinguished for action than thought; in each of them, doubtless, he felt that, in some measure, he was describing a counterpart of himself. And had he, to use his own expression in one of his dedications, been the citizen of a country which deserved the name of country, instead of being born the subject of an absolute monarch, there is little doubt, that, had he been placed in that country in circumstances likely to call forth energies such as theirs, he might have been the counterpart in action, as he was in feeling, of his Brutus's, his Agis, or his Timoleon.

character, and not the character the form to the exterior circumstance. Their minds are cramped in the fetters of events. They never think or feel but in connection with tangible motives; and so far from the good characters heightening the charm, and the bad ones deepening the gloom, of the scenes that surround them, and the imagination and intellect of both the bad and the good casting an individual and untransferable complexion on the events with which they are ushered into notice, their most marked and distinguishing features on the other hand originate in the transactions in which they are involved. Each of these individuals may be said to be a specimen of a numerous class of beings adverted to in the following line, by the most sublime of our modern poets,—

“ Whose mind is but the mind of his own eyes.”

Before I take leave of the reader, I may suggest, that I was aware that Alfieri, in his tragedy of Mary Queen of Scots, has deviated considerably from historical accuracy; but in my character of Translator, I did not deem myself at liberty to depart from those arrangements as to place and person which he had thought fit to adopt.

October 13, 1814.



PHILIP.

A TRAGEDY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

PHILIP.	LEONARDO.
CARLOS.	ISABELLA.
GOMEZ.	Counsellors.
PEREZ.	Guards.

SCENE.—The Palace of Madrid.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Isa. Love, apprehension, and flagitious hope,
My breast forsake. I, Philip's faithless wife,
Dare I behold with fondness Philip's son?
Yet who beholds that son, and loves him not?
A heart, though bold, humane; a lofty nature;
An intellect sublime; and, in a form
Most fair, a soul of correspondent worth.
Ah, why did Heaven and Nature make thee such?
Alas! why rave I thus? Do I intend,
By meditating thus on his perfections,
To tear his image from the deep recesses
Of my adoring heart? Oh, if a flame
So fatal in its consequences, were
By living man discover'd! Oh, if he
Suspected it! He sees me ever sad...

'Tis true, most sad ; yet evermore avoiding
 The fascination of his thrilling presence.
 And from Spain's austere palace well he knows
 All joy is banish'd. Who can read my heart ?
 Oh that with other mortals I could vie
 In ignorance ! that, as I can deceive,
 And shun the curious world, I could deceive,
 And shun my own corroding consciousness.
 Wretch that I am . . . My only solace left
 Are tears ; and mine, alas, are tears of guilt.
 But, that with less of risk I may indulge
 My wretchedness, to some interior chamber
 Let me retire in time . . . Ah, who is this ?
 Carlos ? . . . Ah, let me fly ! My every look,
 My every word, might now betray me. Hence
 With speed.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Carlos, Isabella.

Car. Oh sight ! what ails thee, queen, that thus
 Thou shun'st my presence ? Dost thou thus avoid
 A wretch by wrongs oppress'd ?

Isa. Prince . . .

Car. Well I know
 My father's court is leagued against my safety.
 That I, displeasing to my sire and king,
 Should read impress'd on every countenance,
Enmity, malice, envy ill-concealed,
 Excites no wonder. But I scarce believe
 That thou, not harden'd by fell cruelty,
 Thou, who beneath a more auspicious sky
 Than this, wert born ; thou, not as yet corrupted

By this infected atmosphere, concealst,
Beneath that soothing, yet majestic mien,
A bosom inaccessible to pity.

Isa. Within these thresholds what a life I lead
Too well thou know'st. The manners, new to me,
Of a pride-harden'd court, have not yet driven
The partial fondness for one's native soil,
That universal instinct, from my breast.
Thy pangs I know, the insults undeserved
That thou endurest; know and pity them.

Car. Thou pitiest them? Oh, sweetest consolation!

That kind assurance sheds on all my cares
Benign forgetfulness. And with *thy* griefs
I sympathize; and thoughts of thy distress
Oft banish my own torments from my heart.
Tears for thy cruel lot I often shed,
And fain . . .

Isa. A lot more easy to endure,
I hope in time to gain. My ills with thine
Are not to be compared; then yield them not
A pity so intense.

Car. Does pity thus
From me offend, when thine to me is life?

Isa. Thou prizest at a rate extravagant
That powerless pity.

Car. Ah! Extravagant . . .
What say'st thou? Tell me what emotion then
Excels or equals that soft beat of pity,
Thrilling the pulses of each noble heart;
Which, of itself, suffices to avenge
The wrongs of fortune; and no longer leaves
That heart unblest, whose comprehensive love

Embraces every where the cause of man.

Isa. What say'st thou? Yes, I pity thee.—Oh,
Heaven!

I feel not towards thee as a step-dame feels.
And if I dared for the unoffending son
Plead to the offended father, in thy cause
My prayers should soon be heard.

Car. Who dare do this?
And further if thou durst 'twould misbecome thee.
Oh, hard necessity! Thou art the cause,
Innocent as thou art, of all my woes;
Yet I conjure thee in my favour...

Isa. I
The cause of all thy anguish?...

Car. Yes, my anguish
May to that fatal day be all referr'd,
That day accursed that gave, and took thee from
me.

Isa. Ah! what dost thou recall? Too transient
was

That hope.

Car. The best part of myself, in me
That hope grew with my life, nursed by my sire,
That sire who will'd so solemn an engagement
Unnaturally to dissolve.

Isa. Alas!...

Car. At once
Subject, and son, of monarch absolute,
I groan'd in agony, but held my peace;
I wept, but wept in secret. To my will
His will was law supreme. He was thy husband,
And from my uncomplaining passiveness,
Who but myself can sum up what I suffer'd!

From such an effort of transcendent virtue,
 (Virtue it was, and passing human strength)
 My heart was steep'd in pride and bitterness.
 On duty's stern, inexorable law,
 Mine eyes were ever fix'd. If e'en in thought
 Nature was frail, I call to witness Heaven,
 Who knows our inmost impulses. In tears
 The day, in tears the tedious night I spent,
 And what avail'd it? In my father's bosom
 Hatred increased, as in my bosom grief.

Isa. Believe the assurance, that thy father's heart,
 Though tainted with suspicion, hates thee not.
 Perhaps in thy father's breast the train of courtiers
 Have sown suspicion, who, from thy contempt,
 The more they feel its justice more detest thee.

Car. Ah! thou art ignorant of my father's nature,
 And may kind heaven that ignorance prolong!
 The treacherous intrigues of an impious court
 To thee are all unknown. An upright heart
 Could not believe, much less such guilt imagine.
 More cruel than the sycophantic train
 Surrounding him, 'tis Philip that abhors me.
 He sets the example to the servile crowd;
 His wrathful temper chafes at nature's ties;
 Yet do not I forget that he's my father.
 If, for one day I could forget that tie,
 And rouse the slumbers of my smother'd wrongs,
 Never, oh never, should he hear me mourn
 My ravish'd honours, my offended fame,
 His unexampled and unnatural hate;
 No, of a wrong more deep I would upbraid him,
 * He took my all the day he tore thee from me.

Isa. Prince, dost thou then so little call to mind

That he's thy father, and thy king?—

Car. I pray thee
Pardon the involuntary turbulence
Of a nigh-bursting heart. I never found
Before this moment the convenient time
To tell thee all my sorrows.

Isa. Nor should'st thou
Have told them now, nor should I listen to them.

Car. Stay. Since in part thou hast heard my
wretchedness,
Hear what remains. I am constrain'd to say...

Isa. Peace. Quit my presence.

Car. Princess, I obey.
I will refrain from words, but oh, how much
Remains to utter! My last hope...

Isa. What hope,
That is not criminal, canst thou now cherish?

Car. Hope that thou dost not hate me.

Isa. 'Tis my duty;
Thou must confess it, if thou dare to love me.

Car. Then give me proof of hatred, and thyself
Be my accuser to thy spouse and king.

Isa. Shall I, before that king, pronounce thy name?

Car. Yes; if thou deem me guilty.

Isa. Is thy guilt

Unshared?

Car. In secret then perchance...

Isa. Alas!

What have I said? or thou hast understood,
Or I have utter'd, more than duty warrants.
Think, I conjure thee, on thyself and me,
Thou, in persisting, I, in hearing thee,
Merit the king's revenge.

Car. Ah, if in heart
Thou wert inflamed, and pined'st as I pine,
And if thou saw'st a thousand times a day
The adored object in another's arms,—
To track the footsteps of thy ravish'd love;
To satisfy thine eyes; sometimes to seek,
As now I seek, an innocent relief
From a few accents, to thy breaking heart;
Thou would'st esteem a venial indulgence.

Isa. Ah, shun my presence. While I pine in life,
'Twill be but for a little time, forsake
These fatal walls.

Car. Oh, heavens! and could I thus
Absent myself? My frustrated attempt
Would swell my list of crimes; and, as it is,
With crimes enow my father charges me.
The only one of which I am culpable,
He knows it not.

Isa. Ah, that I knew it not!

Car. If that offend thee, thou wilt have thy vengeance,
And that too, quickly. Let me linger here . . .
If to the grave my anguish bring me not,
The hatred of my sire will drag me there:
Who, in his heart of blood, has long resolved
My death. Within these horrible abodes,
Yet, since they shelter thee, dear to my soul,
Ah, suffer me, a victim in thy sight,
To breathe my latest sigh!

Isa. Ah, sight of woe!
While thou stay'st here I fear too much thy fate.
A voice announces thy sad destiny
To my foreboding heart. At once receive

The first and latest pledge of luckless love.
Fly, I conjure thee, if thou love me truly,
From cruel Philip.—

Car. 'Tis impossible.

Isa. Then fly my presence more than ever now,
And keep at once thy fame untouched, and mine.
Oh, clear thyself of the invented fault
Of which thou art charged by jealous envy. Live—
'Tis I command thee, live! With thee my thoughts,
With thee my heart in spite of all my struggles,
With thee my soul will go. Lose e'en the trace
Of my sad steps, nor let me hear thee more,
No, never. Heaven only knows our fault.
Let us conceal it from the world, conceal it—
E'en from ourselves: and from thy bosom rend
The rooted recollection . . . if thou canst.

Car. Wilt thou then no more hear me? never
more?

✓
SCENE THE THIRD.

Carlos.

Car. Oh wretched me! oh, moment of distraction!
And dost thou leave me thus? Oh cruel lot!
Sorrow and joy assail me in extremes.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Carlos, Perez.

Per. At last I have found thee, Prince . . . but heavens!
whence springs
Such agitation? what disturbs thee thus?

Thy transport seems to baffle reason's power.
 My ready sympathy awaits thy grief.
 Ah, speak! thou answerest not! from earliest years
 Have I not grown thy comrade at thy side?
 Hast thou not call'd me friend?

Car. Within these walls
 Dar'st thou to such a word give utterance?
 A word that's banish'd in its real meaning
 From impious courts, though often there pronounced.
 Useless to me, and fatal to thyself,
 Henceforth will be thy truth. Oh imitate
 The fickle crowd, and to the sovereign idol
 Present, with it, a profitable incense.

Per. Ah, do not thus degrade me: from that crowd
 Sever me in thy judgment; yet what boots it
 To swear affiance here? where all men swear it,
 And all are perjured. To more certain proof
 Bring both my hand and heart. Point out the dan-
 ger

That I may brave for thee. Where is the foe
 That most offends thee? Speak...

Car. No enemy
 Have I except my father. I disdain
 To grace his parasites with such a name.
 With silence his, their hate with scorn, I meet.

Per. The king knows not the truth: hence he is
 inflamed

Towards thee with wrath unjust; and artfully
 Others that wrath foment. In manly tones
 I will assert it for thee.

Car. What sayest thou?
 More than thou thinkest, Philip knows the truth;
 He hates it rather than is ignorant of it.

But in my favour he hears no one speak.

Per. He must perforce the voice of nature hear.

* *Car.* He has a heart less flexible than steel.

Leave to my innocence my best defence,

And to divine protection, which sometimes

Deigns to shed on me a benign regard.

If I were guilty, I would not disdain

As intercessor thee, and thee alone :

What greater proof of friendship can I give thee ?

Per. Permit me then to share, whate'er it be,
Thy destiny—this, and no more, I ask.

In this flagitious court what other track,

That honour's voice forbids not to pursue ?

* *Car.* Perchance thou art ignorant that my destiny,
Whate'er it be, can ne'er be fortunate.

* *Per.* I am thy friend, and not the friend of fortune.

If it be true that grief, when shared, is lessened,

A persevering friend, thou shalt possess

Me, by thy side, in all adversity.

Car. My heart conceals a grief that ends in death,
A lofty grief, that yet is precious to me.

Why cannot I to thee reveal my thoughts ?

Ah, no ! I do not seek, nor could I find,

A more disinterested friend than thou :

Yet by disburthening my oppressed heart,

I cannot give thee a sure pledge of friendship.

Depart : What can result to thee from faith

So generous, and so lucklessly affianced ?

I am not worthy of so rich a tribute.

Once more I bid thee quit me. Knowest thou not

* 'Tis an atrocious fault to fix thy love

On one towards whom his king directs his hate ?

Per. But knowest thou not, in spite of every king,

What glory 'tis that friendship to preserve?
 Thou piercest, but thou changest not my heart,
 With doubting thus my faith A mortal grief,
 A grief thou mayest not speak, weighs on thy breast.
 I do not wish to know it. But if I
 Wish, yea implore, that, with thy life, my life
 May fall a victim to that grief, canst thou
Fiercely reject that brotherhood in woe?

Car. Well, as thou wilt. Here is my plighted
 hand,

Disastrous pledge of a disastrous friendship.
 Thee I compassionate : but shall not bewail
 Henceforth my fate ; nor providence upbraid,
 So bounteous to me in so rare a friend.—
Philip, how much am I more blest than thou !
Thou, 'midst vain pomp and treacherous adulation,
Object of pity rather than of envy,
Hast never known the blessedness of friendship.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Philip, Gomez.

Phi. What, above all things that this world can
 give,
 Dost thou hold dear?

Gom. Thy favour.

Phi. By what means
 Dost hope to keep it?

Gom. By the means that gain'd it :
 Obedience and silence.

Phi. Thou art called

*entire to correct
+ by some one*

This day to practise both.

Gom. 'Tis no new function :

Thou knowest that I . . .

* *Phi.* I know that thou hast been,
Among the faithful, still most faithful found.
But on this day, on which my mind revolves
Affairs of import high, perchance my lips
Will utterance give to plans so new and vast,
That, as a prologue to my after-speech,
It seemed to me expedient to recall,
In a few words, thy duties to thy mind.

Gom. Then may the mighty Philip, on this day,
More thoroughly than he has ever done,
Bring to the test my truth.

Phi. The task is light
That I enjoin—and light alone to thee :
Never, no never, to another man.
The queen forthwith is coming. Thou wilt hear me
Converse with her at length. Meanwhile do thou
Watch the minutest workings of her countenance.
Fasten on her the inquisitorial look,
That look with which thou art skilful to unravel
The unspoken inmost inclinations
Of thy king's inmost heart, ere silently
Thou bodiest them in action.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Philip, Isabella, Gomez.

Isa. My lord, I come, obedient to thy will.

Phi. Queen, thou art summon'd in a mighty cause.

Isa. Ah ! wherefore . . .

Phi. Quickly shalt thou hear it, queen.

Can I expect it from thee? Yet why doubt?
Who can with more sincerity impart
Than thou, impartial counsel to my breast?

* *Isa.* Counsel, my lord, from me?

Phi. Than that of others, ^{not true}
More I esteem thy judgment. Hitherto
If thou hast never shared with me the toils
Of government, thou shouldest not ascribe it
To the defective fondness of thy husband,
Nor to thy king's defective confidence,
But to my fond anxiety to screen thee
From toils of state too weighty for thy sex.
But, to my sorrow, I behold the day
On which a question of debate arises,
Where ties of blood with schemes of policy
Are so confounded, that, by nature, thou
Art designated my prime counsellor.
But first I feel inclined to hear from thee,
Whether thou judgest of most sanctity,
Most to be dreaded, most to be revered,
The name of Father, or the name of King?—

Isa. They are held by all of equal sanctity.
Who knows not this?

* *Phi.* He who most ought to know it.
But tell me also, ere the fact I state,
And tell without reserve, dost love, or hate,
Carlos my son?

* *Isa.* My lord? . . .

* *Phi.* I understand thee.
If thou didst yield to thy first impulses,
And not obey the stern behests of duty,
Thou wouldst behold him . . . as a step-dame.

Isa. No.

Thou art deceived . . . The Prince . . .

Phi. Is dear then to thee.

Yet hast thou so much of true honour left,
That being Philip's wife, that Philip's son
Thou lov'st with . . . love maternal.

Isa Thou alone

Art law to all my thoughts. Thou lovest him . . .
At least I deem so . . . and e'en so I love him.

Phi. Since thy well-regulated, noble heart,
Beholds not Carlos with a step-dame's thought,
Nor with blind instinct of maternal fondness,
I chuse thee for that Carlos as a judge.

Isa. Me? . . .

Phi. Thou hast heard it. Carlos the first object
Was many many years of all my hope,
Till, having turned his footsteps from the path
Of virtue, he that lofty hope betray'd.
How many pleas did I, from time to time,
Invent to excuse my disobedient son?
But now his insane, impious hardihood,
Hath reached its greatest height; and I am com-
pell'd,

Compell'd against my will, to means of violence.
To his past crimes such turpitude he adds,
Such, that, compared with this, all others vanish;
Such, that words fail me to express his baseness.
With outrage so immense he hath assail'd me
As all comparison to baffle; such,
That, from a son, no father could expect it;
Such, that no longer I account him son.
Ah! thou e'en shudderest ere thou knowest its vast-
ness!

Hear it, and shudder in another fashion.
 More than five years thou knowest a wretched crew
 On swampy soil, and shores whelm'd by the ocean,
 Have dared my sovereign mandate to resist;
 Rebels no less to God than to their king.
 They find in iterated crimes defence.
 Thou knowest with what expense of blood and treasure

This realm hath borne this sacrilegious war.
 I would not suffer that rebellious crew
 To go unpunished, with mock majesty
 To triumph in their crimes, though perseverance
 In such a cause cost both my throne and life.
 To immolate the impious generation
 As victims of my wrath, I swear to Heaven.
 And death perchance may be a benefit
 To those who spurn at all authority.
 Now, who from me would credit the assurance
 That with such dire, and such ferocious foes,
 * I am compell'd to enumerate my son,
 Alas! my own, my only son?

Isa. The prince? . . .

Phi. The prince! yes, many intercepted letters,
 Clandestine messages, seditious words
 Pronounced incautiously, of this dire fact
 Too certainly convince me! I conjure thee
 To picture to thy mind my agonies,
 A sire betray'd, a circumvented king!
 And to pronounce what lot by justice falls
 From me, his sire, on such an impious son?

Isa. Oh, God! Thou wilt that I pronounce his fate?

Phi. Yes, thou of that art arbitress supreme.

v P. wants You to condemn Carlo

Fear not the monarch, flatter not the father :
Pronounce.

Isa. I fear alone offended justice.
Before the throne's imposing solitude,
By artifice iniquitous, the cause
Of guilt and innocence is oft confounded.

Phi. Canst thou then doubt of what thy king affirms ?

Who more than I can wish him innocent ?
Ah, would to Heaven the impeachment were unfounded.

Isa. By clearest evidence he stands convicted ?

Phi. Who can convict him ? Turbulent and headstrong,

He scorns to bring against the clearest proofs
Some palliative pretexts, much less reasons.
I would not, of this latest misdemeanour,
With him hold conference, till I had calm'd
The first emotions of my just resentment.
But though my rage be mute, stern policy
Moves me to speak. Alas ! the voice of father,
That agonizing voice, resounds within me.

Isa. Ah, hear that voice ! no voice can equal it !
Perhaps he is less a culprit than thou thinkest ;
Indeed his guilt on this emergency
Seems too impossible to challenge credence.
Hear him thyself, whatever be his crimes :
Who than a son, between a son and father,
Can be a mediator more persuasive ?
Granted that he be haughty with a train
Not friendly to the truth, assuredly
Thy presence will subdue his pride. To him
Open thine ears, and harden not thy heart

To the soft influence of paternal love.
 Him to thy presence never dost thou summon,
 Never speak to him. He approaches thee
 Impress'd with fear ; and love and confidence
 Are scared by thy inflexible reserve.
Revive within him, if it be suppressed,
His native virtue ; 'tis impossible
 That, in thy son, it can be quite extinguished.
 To no one else trust thy paternal cares ;
 Present to him the aspect of a father,
 Reserve a monarch's majesty for others.
 What, from a generous heart, may not be gain'd
 By generous treatment ? If he be convicted
 Of some delinquency (and who is perfect ?)
 To him alone do thou alone display
 Thy just resentment.
There is affection in a father's wrath ;
 What son can witness it, and tremble not ?
 One accent that paternal fondness dictates,
 Would, in that noble breast, remorse more deep
 Excite, and less of rancour, than ten thousand
 Malignantly, and artfully pronounced,
 To drive him on to desperation,
 By treacherous, seeming friends. Let thy court hear
 That thou dost highly prize, and love, thy son ;
 That thou accountest his impetuous youth
 Worthy of pardon, though not free from blame ;
 And thou wilt hear, with one consenting voice,
 Thy universal court resound his praise.
 Suspensions not thine own tear from thy heart ;
 And leave base apprehensions of foul treason
 To monarchs who deserve to be betray'd.
Phi. This action, worthy of thyself, is thine

Alone ; to make the cry of nature reach
 A father's heart : ah, others act not thus !
 Oh wretched lot of kings, they cannot utter,
 Tremble to utter, much less dare obey,
 Nature's benign affections. How I rave !
 Even dare they make mention of them ? no :
 They are compell'd, by interest of state,
 To stifle and dissemble utterly
All natural impulses. The time is come
 When in my breast they shall find free admission.
Thy intercession, more than perhaps thou dreamest,
Hath torn the veil from every mystery.
 Almost I am compell'd to deem him guiltless,
 Since thou dost think him so. Without delay
 Bring the prince hither, Gomez.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Philip, Isabella.

Phi. Thou now shalt see that to the guilty prince
 I can appear, more than is fit, a father ;
 If I must ever be compell'd to meet him
 In all the terrors of a king offended.—

Isa. I do not doubt thy promise. But he comes :
 Suffer me to depart.

Phi. Stay—I command thee.

Isa. I have ventured to express my thoughts to
 thee

Since thou wouldst have it so. Why tarry longer ?
 The presence of a step-dame, when a son
 Meets an offended father, were intrusive.

Phi. Intrusive ? No. Thou much deceivest thy-
 self,

Thou art a necessary witness.

Thou hast alone a step-dame's name. For once
From thy remembrance banish e'en the name.

Thy presence will be grateful to my son.

Ah, see, he comes : and he shall not be ignorant

* That, of thy own accord, thou hast pledged thyself
As surety, for his virtue, faith, and love.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Philip, Isabella, Carlos, Gomez.

Phi. Approach me, prince. Now tell me when
will dawn

That day in which, with the fond name of son,
Thy father may accost thee. Thou should'st see,
(Ah, would'st thou have it so) blended at once
The name of father and of king ; ah, why,
Since thou lov'st not the one, fear'st not the other ?

Car. My lord, though these unmerited reproaches,
Ere now, have often jarred upon my ears,
They always sound most harsh and unprovoked.
Silence from thee seems not so wonderful ;
Guilty I am, if in thy sight I seem so.

'Tis true my heart assents not to the charge,
Free from conviction and remorse it glows,
But not the less profound regret it feels
That thou esteem'st me guilty.—

Oh, could I trace the source of my misfortunes,
Or, if the phrase seem more appropriate,
Know the true origin of my offences !

Phi. Thy love so lukewarm towards thy native
country ;

And towards thy father thy . . . no love at all ;

Thy guilty intercourse with crafty flatterers . . .
Enquire no further why thou dost offend me.

Car. I am pleased, at least, that thou hast not ascribed

This to a nature innately perverse.

I may make some amends for what is past;
Learn with what fondness I should love my father,
And how to love my country; learn the means
To banish grovelling flatterers from my presence,
Who, in proportion as the father's power
That of the son's transcends, the father's ears
With lies more pertinaciously assault.

Phi. Thou art still a youth. Thy heart, thy look,
thy actions,

Too plainly tell that much beyond discretion
Thou trustest to thyself. This I should deem
Only a venial error of thy age,

If I did not with disappointment witness,

* That, as thy years advance, thy judgment seems,
Instead of perfecting, more immature.

I shall account thy error of to-day

A youthful indiscretion, though, alas!

It bears the marks of veteran turpitude.

Car. Error? . . . but what?

Phi. And thou dost ask it of me?

And art thou not aware that all thy thoughts,
Much more thy daring deeds, thy thoughts most
secret,

To me are all reveal'd? Queen, thou beholdest:

'Tis not to be, but not to feel himself

Worthy of blame, that constitutes his guilt.

Car. Father, at last from doubt deliver me:
What have I done?

Phi. So manifold thy crimes,
That doubt of which shall prompt my just reproach,
Serves thee instead of innocence. Now hear me.
Say, hast thou not had commerce with that soil
Where most the furnace of sedition blazes?
E'en in my palace, did'st thou not perchance,
Before the dawn of day, clandestinely,
A trait'rous and protracted audience give
To the orator of the Batavian rebels?
To that base miscreant who comes begging pity,
If you believe his words, but who, in heart,
Perfidious machinations cherishes,
And projects of rebellion unavenged.

Car. Father, must my most unimportant actions
Be all ascribed to guilt? 'Tis true, I spoke
At length to the ambassador; 'tis true
That I, with him, compassionate the fate
Of those thy hapless subjects, and I dare
Avow the same compassion in thy presence.
Nor thou thyself would'st long withhold thy pity,
Provided that, like me, thou hadst heard at length
Of the iron government, in which, oppressed
Beneath proud, avaricious, inexpert,
Weak, cruel, yet unpunished ministers,
So many years they have groan'd. For their mis-
fortunes

My heart with pity bleeds; I boldly own it:
And say, would'st thou, that I, the son of Philip,
Possessed a vulgar or a cruel heart?
The hope perhaps was too presumptuous
That I, with stating the unvarnished truth,
Could wake, this day, thy bosom to compassion.
But how can I be thought to offend a father

In holding him accessible to pity?
If thou on earth dost wish to represent
The Ruler of the skies, what attribute
Like that of mercy, fixes the resemblance?
But, notwithstanding, of my punishment
Thou art arbiter supreme, if I appear,
Or am, on this occasion criminal.
The only boon I dare to challenge of thee,
Is to be spared th' unworthy name of traitor.

Phi. A noble pride breathes in thy every word.
Ill canst thou, nor should'st thou affect to do it,
The lofty motives penetrate, or judge,
That influence thy king. Hence thou should'st tame
That turbulence undisciplined; that bold
Impatient wish to give advice unasked;
Thy judgments, as if fraught with mighty sense,
Officiously to impart. Learn to be cautious, 't
If on the mightiest of the thrones of Europe
Thou art destined to be honour'd by the world.
That indiscretion now in thee may please,
Which then may cast upon thy character
A stain of deep reproach. 'Tis time, I warn thee,
T' assume a new deportment. Thou hast sought
Pity from me, and pity shalt thou find;
But for thyself: all are not worthy of it.
Leave me to be sole judge of my own measures.
Erewhile in thy behalf, and not in vain,
The queen at length addressed me. Of my love,
No less than of her own, she deems thee worthy...
To her, more than to me, thou owest thy pardon...
To her. From this day forward I expect
That thou wilt better know both how to prize,
And how deserve my favour.—Now behold,

By thy solicitations I am won,
Oh queen; and, urged by thee, consent to learn
Not only to forgive, but *love* my son.

Isa. My lord?

Phi. To thee I owe it, and to thee
Alone. For thee have I repressed my wrath,
And in th' indulgent character of father
Have I reproved my son. Of this day's mercy
Mayest thou ne'er give me reason to repent.
Oh, son! that thou mayest not defeat her hope,
Strive to attach her more by thy deportment.
That he may be progressive in amendment,
Do thou, oh queen, more frequently permit him
Thy presence to enjoy . . . speak to him . . . guide
him . . .

And listen to her thou, and shun her not.
I will that it be so.

Car. Oh, how the sound
Of pardon, when addressed to me, is irksome!
But if I must accept it from my father,
And, lady, thou obtain that pardon for me,
May my fate grant (my fate my only crime)
That I may never more endure the shame.

Phi. Rather should'st thou take shame to have
needed pardon,
Than, needing, to have gain'd it from thy father.
Let this for once suffice: weigh well my words.
Do thou, oh queen, withdraw to thy apartments;
Thou shalt, ere long, behold me there. Meanwhile
I must bestow on other weighty cares
A few brief moments.

*Philos
Hornblows*

SCENE THE FIFTH.

*Philip, Gomez.**Phi.* Heard'st thou?*Gom.* I heard.*Phi.* Sawest thou?*Gom.* I saw.*Phi.* Oh, rage!

Then the suspicion...

Gom. Now is certainty.*Phi.* And Philip yet is unrevenged?*Gom.* Reflect...*Phi.* I have reflected. Follow thou my footsteps.

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Carlos, Isabella.

Car. Pardon, oh pardon, my unwonted boldness,
 If at an uncouth and unusual hour
 I asked by thy Elvira a brief audience.
 I was impelled to this by urgent motives.

Isa. What is thy wish? Why dost thou not resolve

To leave me to myself? Why seek to lessen
 That peace I scarcely have!... why came I here?

Car. Be pacified. I leave thee instantly;
 Leave thee, and to my wonted tears return.
 Listen to me. Erewhile thou dared'st entreat
 My father in my favour. A great fault
 Didst thou commit. I come to tell thee of it.

And grant, kind Heaven, that I alone may feel
 Its punishment! He deign'd to make a shew
 Of austere pity, and pronounced my pardon,
 Pledge of redoubled persecution.
 The spectacle of pity in another
 Maddens the pitiless bosom of a tyrant.
 Of this thy unsuspecting nature dreamt not:
 I come here to remind thee of this truth:
 And to assure thee that, of storms of hatred,
 In Philip's nature, pity is the prelude.
 A terror that my heart ne'er knew before
 From that sad instant seized it. I am confounded—
 In language new he spake to me. Of love,
 Of unaccustom'd love, made vain display.
 Ah, never more to him pronounce my name.

Isa. To me he first spoke of thee; and almost
 Constrain'd me to reply. His boiling rage
 Seemed by my accents wholly pacified.
 And now when he had just addressed himself
 To thee, in accents of paternal love,
 He wept, and praised thee in my presence. Think,
 He is thy father: nor can I believe
 That thee, his only son, he does not love.
 Resentment blinds thee. Thou supposest in him
 Hatred that cannot in his heart take root.
 Ah, hapless destiny, I am the cause
 That thou art from him estranged.

Car. Oh, noble lady,
 Ill dost thou know us both. I hate him not,
 Although I shudder at his presence. True,
 I envy him a prize of which he's robb'd me,
 And which he merits not. Its matchless worth,

No, no, he cannot feel. Yet, wert thou blest,
My grief were less intense.

Isa. Spite of thyself

Thou turn'st to thy accustom'd lamentations.
Carlos, farewell. Henceforward be assured
That I will weigh with care my every word
Ere I pronounce thy name in Philip's presence.
I also fear . . . the son more than the father.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Carlos.

Car. Oh, noble heart ! ill fitted for suspicion;
I fear thy destiny . . . But who approaches ?

SCENE THE THIRD.

Gomez, Carlos.

Car. What will'st thou, Gomez ?

Gom. I expect the king,

Who, at this hour, enjoin'd me here to meet him.
Mean time, oh prince, admit me to a share
Of the just transport which must overwhelm thee
On the recover'd favour of thy father.
As far as I have credit in his presence,
I do assure thee I have always spoken
In thy behalf. Command me to thy service,
And I am ready further to assist thee.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Gomez.

Gom. Intolerably proud, but more incautious.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Philip, Leonardo, Perez, Gomez, Counsellors, and Guards.

Phi. Guards! see that no one dare to enter here.—
I summon you, my faithful few adherents,
To an unusual meeting. Listen to me.
But, ere I speak, what horror overwhelms me!
What icy coldness shoots through all my veins!
In my eye stands the tear. My tremulous voice,
As if it feared to be the instrument
Of my heart's heaviness, in broken accents
Faulters—Should I give utterance then? I ought—
Not I, my country wills it. Who would think it?
Among you here convened I seat myself
The accuser, not the judge: that cannot be.—
And were not I of such a criminal
The accuser, who would hazard the attempt?—
Ah, me! e'en now I see you take the alarm;
All shudder.—What will then your feelings be
When I'm constrained to speak the name . . . of Car-
los?

Leon. Thy only son?

Per. Of what can he be guilty?

Phi. By an ungrateful son my peace is ruin'd!
That peace, which each of you, more blest than I,
Feels in the bosom of his family!—
In vain have I adopted towards my son
Rigour, with mildness temper'd; vainly tried
By warm reproof to encourage him to virtue.
To entreaty, and example, deaf alike,
And still more deaf to menaces, he adds

One trespass to another ; and to these
Impious presumption. So that, at their height,
This day has filled the measure of his crimes.
Yes, though I gave to him this day new proofs
Of indiscreet affection, he selects
This very day to give his father's heart
Proofs of a veteran impiety.—
Scarce had the glowing orb, which rules the day,
The shining witness of my daily actions,
Retired to cheer my transatlantic realm,
Than with the shades of night, to traitors friendly,
A project horrible and black arose
Within the heart of Carlos. Silently,
To avenge himself for his forgiven crimes,
He steels with murderous foot towards my chamber.
His right-hand with a parricidal sword
He dared to arm : Approached me unawares ;
The weapon lifts ; and almost buries it
In my debilitated frame . . . when, lo !
All unexpectedly, a voice exclaims,—
“ Philip, be on thy guard ! ” It was Rodrigo
That came to me. At the same time I feel
The stroke, as of a lightly grazing sword
Defeated of its aim. My eager eyes
Glance through the obscure distance. At my feet
A naked sword I see ; and in swift flight
Remote, amid the night's uncertain shadows,
Behold my son. I now have told you all.
If there be those among my friends convened,
Who can accuse him of another fault ;
If there be those who can of this fault clear him,
Speak without hesitation : and may Heaven
Inspire his utterance ! This is no light question.

My counsellors, deliberately weigh it.
A solemn judgment you are now convened
To pass upon my son, and on myself.

Gom. What dost thou ask, oh king? Can we be-
tray

Philip, betray ourselves? But can we plunge
The murderous weapon in a father's heart?—
Put not our truth to so severe a test.—

Leon. The day may come, oh king, when thou thy-
self

May'st bitterly repent to have heard the truth;
When thou may'st make us also, who thus dare
To speak it in thy ears, repent our rashness.

Per. The truth can never injure. From our lips
It is required; be it not then suppressed.

Phi. The king, and not the father, listens to you.

Gom. I will then speak the first; the first will
brave

The anger of a father; for thou art
A father still; and in that countenance
Artfully stern, less menacing than troubled,
'Tis plain that if the monarch condemns Carlos,
The son the father pardons: his misdeeds
Thou wilt not, perhaps can'st not, enumerate.
It seems a light delinquency to Carlos
To make a compact with thy rebel subjects:
Here is a paper found upon his person,
In which at once he covenants our ruin,
And his own infamy. He dares to treat
With France, yes, with detested France to treat.
Here you will read an infamous surrender
Of Catalonia and Navarre, proposed,
And other fertile provinces, attached

By our forefathers' valour, and retained
 By sweat and blood of our contemporaries,
 To the throne of Spain. A portion so important
 Of such a mighty realm, prey to the French,
 Is offered as the execrable price
 Of execrable aid, against the father,
 Lent to the son; and what remains of Spain
 Will be oppressed with foul impunity
 By that deceitful offspring of a father,
 Whose sense, whose strength, are competent to wield
 The sceptre of the universal world.
 Behold what destiny awaits us.—Ah!
 Thy life is indispensable, oh king,
 To us, thy sacred life! But equally
 The far-famed glory of the Spanish empire
 To us is indispensable and sacred.
 'Tis guilt in all its worst atrocity
 To seek to assassinate a king and father;
 But in one moment to betray one's honour,
 One's country to betray (I am compelled
 Thus by a dire necessity to speak,)
 Perhaps is no less a crime. The forfeiture
 By which thou art injured, thy paternal heart
 Might perhaps extenuate: but the other crime?...
 That also thou might'st be inclined to pardon:—
 But when they both in foul array are join'd,
 With such a list of trait'rous trespasses,
 What other doom can I pronounce than death?

Per. Death! Is it death thou sayest?

Phi. Merciful heavens!—

Leon. Who would believe that I am compelled to
 add

To the execrable names of parricide,

Traitor and rebel, one more foul than these ?
Yet there remains another epithet
Of such atrocity, that mortal tongue
Dare scarcely give it utterance.

Phi. It is ? . . .

Leon. Blasphemer of the majesty of Heaven.—

Oh God omnipotent, deign to inspire
The utterance of thy vile, yet faithful servant !
The day is come, the moment is arrived,
When thou, with one retributory flash
Of thy tremendous and avenging looks,
Shalt cast to earth him, who, in pride of heart,
Hath long presumed thy terrors to defy.
Thou raisest me up as an instrument
Of thy offended majesty; and givest
My swelling breast a super-human boldness;
A boldness worthy of the cause.—Oh hear,
Thou monarch of the earth, by my lips hear,
What, in his terrors, the offended king
Of Heaven inspires. The prince, whom I account
So impious, that I dare not of my king
Call him the son; the prince unceasingly,
With lips impure, pronounces blasphemies,
No less injurious to high heaven itself
Than to its hallowed ministers. The cry,
The cry prophane reaches the house of God:
He mocks the worship of his ancestors,
And patronizes the new heresy:
And we should see, were he upon the throne,
The sacred altars levelled with the ground,
And each mysterious symbol of our worship
Trodden to dust with sacrilegious feet.—
Yes, we should see it. But if till that time

corrupt court

The flaming sword of God delay'd its office,
A sight like this should never blast my eyes.
They who preferred not death to such a sight
Alone should witness it. I would not see
The sacred veil profanely torn away ;
That salutary veil that hides the truth
From minds, which, though they comprehend it not,
Believe it, and its functionaries dread :
Nor witness the iniquitous destruction,
Which, in his fury, he has sworn to accomplish,
Of that august tribunal, which, on earth,
Presents an image of supernal justice,
And makes that justice less inflexible :
Of that tribunal, which preserves entire,
To the confusion of less favour'd climes,
The faith transmitted to our ancestors.
May Heaven confound the impious wish ! May hell
In vain conspire to aid it ! Lift thine eyes,
Thou earthly monarch, to the King of Heaven.
To him thou owest thy life, thy power, thy honour.
He can take all away. If he is offended,
Thy son's the culprit. Look on him, and see
The fatal sentence legibly inscribed.
Without delay fulfil it : on his head,
That Heaven, which he has outraged, hurls its vengeance.

Per. From servile bosoms 'tis not hard to gain,
In a bad cause, opinions frankly spoken.
Nor is it seldom that the sentiments
Most freely uttered are themselves constrained ;
And baseness in its multifarious changes
Can clothe itself in feigned audacity.—
Listen to me, oh king, and thou shalt hear

Free thoughts expressed with freedom. Listen to me,
 And thou shalt see another sort of boldness.
 The scroll is forged. The accusers disagree,
 And contradict each other. If the prince
 With parricidal hand approached his father,
 What from the foolish compact could he hope
 With the Batavian rebels? To what purpose
 The succour of the French? Why share with them
 His heritage? Divide, without a motive,
 Realms over which he held a rightful sway?
 But if by means so impious and strange
 He wished to alleviate his own destiny,
 Why so incautiously attempt the deed?
 Or why contrive such guilt, and in the midst
 Desist? Baffled by whom? If such a crime,
 By such a means he attempted, I account him
Rather a madman than a murderer.
 He knows that always in defence of kings
 (E'en though they hate them) emulously watch
 Those who derive from them power, wealth, and
 rank.

Thou sawest thy son in flight. I shrewdly guess
 Thou sawest him with the eyes of other men.
 Let him come here, and speak in his own cause.
 In the mean time, that he has not assailed
 Thy life I swear, yea, by my head, I swear it;
 Or, if that oath suffice not, by my honour:—
That honour o'er which kings have no controul.
 What shall I say of the impiety,
 In which, with tones of holy indignation,
 A lying piety hath dared to impeach him?
 What boots it that I say that those there are,
 Beneath a veil of well-assumed devotion,

Who hide the basest motives; they confound
Their interests with the interests of Heaven,
And artfully, with a feigned zeal, contrive
To be the ministers of blood and outrage?
Who knows it not? And further I affirm,
The prince hath always proved that he possessed
A heart humane, a lofty sense of honour,
A soul as beauteous as the form it dwelt in:
His father's fondest hopes he realized,
E'en from his earliest years: Thou said'st 'twas so,
And all believe thy words. I think so still.
'Tis not in nature that a mind should pass,
Distinguished for its virtue, to the height,
At once, of guilt. That he has always suffered
His wrongs, so many, and so oft repeated,
With silence, weeping, and profound submission,
I can bear witness. 'Tis a truth, though strange,
That tears are construed sometimes into guilt;
And there are hearts of such a wrathful mould,
That grief, instead of pity, wakes their anger.
Ah, thou art a father . . . harden not thy heart . . .
Weep with thy weeping son; he is not guilty;
But of the wretched, wretchedest of men.
Yet if he were ten thousand times more guilty
Than any here, who would blaspheme his nature,
Yell out in hate, a father never can,
Nor ought he, to condemn his son to death.

Phi. Pity, at last, I find in one of you,
And pity shall obey. Father I am;
And to the feelings of a father yield.
Myself, my kingdom, all that I possess,
I do abandon to the arbitrement
Inscrutable of Heaven. Carlos, perchance,

Is th' instrument towards me of Heaven's displeasure.

Perish my kingdom, perish Philip rather,
But let my son be safe. I pardon him.

Gom. Thou mak'st thyself, then, greater than the laws.

Why summon us? Thou mayest without our aid
Evade the laws. Absolve, absolve, thou mayest:
But if one day pity be fatal to thee . . .

Per. Pity like this, indeed, will fatal prove:
'Tis too unusual to portend a blessing.

But I protest, whate'er the event may be,
That this debate, to which I've rashly ventured,
Is not a council. Life I value not;

My fame I still hold dear. The world shall know
That I've not bathed my hands in innocent blood.

Let those who will remain. To Heaven alone
My silent prayers I raise: the truth to Heaven

Is manifest . . . Why do I say to Heaven?

If I look round me, am I not convinced

That all whom I survey know the whole truth?

* That all conceal it? That to hear it, speak it,

Hath here long been a capital offence?

Phi. To whom speak'st thou?

Per. Of Carlos to his father!

Phi. And to his king.

Leon. Thou art the sire of Carlos,

And who in thee the conflict does not trace

Of a despairing father? Recollect

That thou art father also of thy subjects,

And that as much as he despises it,

They prize the sacred name. The prince is one;

They, an innumerable multitude.

That one protect, the rest are all in danger.

He is criminal. The rest all innocent.

Dost doubt whether to save that one, or all?

Phi. Do not thus, by reiterated thrusts,
Plunge in my heart the dagger. Pause awhile :
I have not strength to listen to you more.
Let a new council forthwith be assembled
Out of my sight. There let the priests assist,
In whom all worldly impulses are dead.
By their means truth may be promulgated,
And truth alone obeyed. Meet, and pass sentence.
What's just my presence might too much constrain,
Or bring to too severe a test my virtue.

SCENE THE SIXTH.

Philip.

Phi. Oh, what may be the number of the traitors?
Can Perez be so bold? Has he perhaps read
My secret heart? . . . ah, no! . . . but yet what bold-
ness!

What vehement pride! And can a soul so form'd
Spring where I reign? or where I reign exist?

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Carlos.

Car. Shadows of night, far more than beams of
day,

* Suiting the horrors of this guilty palace,
With mournful joy I witness your return!

'Tis not, that from your influence, my grief
Finds intermission : but that, for a time,
I lose the sight of faces that appal me.
Here did Elvira pledge herself to meet me
In Isabella's name. The cause I know not.
What profound silence ! . . . mid their gnawing cares,
Spite of remorse, and spite of dark suspicion,
Calm sleep descends on overshadowing wing
To seal the eyes of tyrants and of traitors !
That sleep, that, like a faithless parasite,
Avoids the eyes of innocence oppressed !
But sleepless nights to me are not unwelcome :
I hold communion with the dear impression
Of all that's fair and virtuous. 'Tis my solace
Here to return where last I parted from her,
And heard expressions, that in one swift moment
Gave me both life and death. Ah, far less wretched,
But far more criminal, than heretofore,
I deem myself since that eventful meeting . . .
Whence does this visionary horror rise ?
Is it the pain that wrings a guilty conscience ?
Yet wherefore ? How have I been criminal ?
I have given utterance : and who that felt
Such throes of passion ever could conceal them ?
I hear, or seem to hear, approaching footsteps.
Elivira comes . . . ah, no ! what deafening clamour !
Who is't approaches ? What a flash of torches !
Armed, and towards me ? Traitors, advance . . .

Rhetorical questions -

SCENE THE SECOND.

Soldiers, with Arms and Torches.

Philip, Carlos.

Car. Oh, heavens !

My father, with so many arm'd attendants ?

Phi. At night, alone, arm'd, and in these apartments,

What art thou doing ? what dost meditate ?

Whither art going ? Speak.

Car. . . . What shall I say ?

The arms I grasp'd at the supposed approach
Of bloody ruffians, in my father's presence

Fall from my hands. Dost thou conduct them ?

Thou,

My father ? At thy will dispose of me.

But tell me, was it needful to use pretexts ?

And such as these ? Ah, father ! pretexts are

Unworthy of a king ; apologies

From my lips now were only more unworthy.

Phi. Dost add presumption to thy other crimes ?

Display it then, for evermore it is

The sure attendant of consummate guilt.

Thou throw'st a cloak of ill-assumed respect

Over thy faithless and ambitious nature ;

Thou dost not seek to palliate thy offences :

To give full vent to thy atrocious rage

Would better suit thy purpose. Pour it out,

The deadly poison that thy heart contains.

With a magnanimous audacity

Confess at once each machination dire,

Worthy of one in treason so accomplish'd !

Car. What have I to confess ? Spare me, oh father,
These useless outrages. Chuse at thy will
What torture suits thee best : if it please thee,
I question not its justice.

Phi. By what means,
In such an unripe age, hast thou attain'd
To this perfection of atrocity ?
How hast thou so consummately acquired
The art of wickedness, that, by thy king,
Caught in this monstrous crime, thou wear'st the
mien
Of innocence ?

Car. Where did I learn it, father ?
Born in thy palace . . .

Phi. Villain, thou wert born there
To my disgrace and shame !

Car. Why dost thou doubt
That shame to wipe away ? who knows it not ?
Thou thirstest for the life-blood of thy son ?

Phi. My son art thou !

Car. But what have I committed ?

Phi. Ask'st thou that question ? ask'st thou it of
me ?

Does no compunction agonize thy heart ?
Ah, no ! Thou long, long since of such a weakness
Hast got clear riddance. 'Tis a pang thou know'st
not ;

Except thou feel it, since in thought alone,
And not in act, thou art a parricide.

Car. A parricide ! What do I hear ? A parricide ?
Thyself dost not believe it : what suspicion,
What probability, what proof, hast thou ?

Handwritten: I would, I might see
father.

Phi. Suspicion, probability, and proof,
Thy contumelious aspect yields them all.

Car. Oh, father, father, do not drive me on
Those holiest of bounds to violate,
Which Heaven, which nature, and the laws, have
placed

Between a king and subject, son and father.

Phi. Thy sacrilegious character long since
Has passed those bounds. What do I say? those
bounds

Were never binding on thy froward nature.

Use not, for ill they suit thee, any longer

The pompous phrases of a high-soul'd virtue.

At once confess to me thy many plots

Projected and accomplished. Speak, what fear'st
thou?

That I am less magnanimous than thou vile?

If thou wilt speak the truth, the whole truth, hope;

If thou equivocate, or be silent, fear.

Car. I speak the truth; 'tis thou compell'st me
to it.

I know myself too well ever to fear;

And thee too well I know ever to hope.

A luckless gift, take thou my life, for thine

It is to take; my honour is my own,

Thou gav'st it not, nor canst thou take it from me.

Guilty I should be, could I stoop to own

A guilt to which my nature is a stranger.

Thou shalt here see me breathe my last; a death

Lingering, opprobrious, full of agonies,

Do thou prepare. Death, in its direst shape,

Cannot degrade me, cannot make me tremble.

Thee, thee alone, and not myself, I pity.

Phi. Presumptuous youth ! and dar'st thou, to
thy king,
Thus give account of thy misdeeds ?

Car. Account ?

Thou hatest me, that is my sole misdeed ;
Thirstest to have my blood, my only crime :
Thou art absolute, this constitutes thy right.

Phi. Guards, mark me, he is your prisoner.

Car. The reply

Is this, usual to tyrants. Here's my arm,
I yield it to the fetters : here my breast,
I bare it to thy sword. Dost hesitate ?
Hast only learned to-day to play the tyrant ?
Day after day thy reign is registered
In characters indelible of blood.

Phi. Guards, drag him from my presence ; and
confine him

In yon adjacent tower's profoundest dungeon.
Death to the slave that listens to his pleadings.

Car. Thou need'st not fear, thy minions emulate
In cruelty their king.

Phi. Drag him by force ;

By force and violence drag him from my presence.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Isabella, Philip.

Isa. Oh, heavens ! what do I see ?

Phi. What ails thee, lady ?

Isa. Throughout the palace shrieks of fear re-
sound.

Phi. Perchance, thou hast heard the cry of fear ? ..

Isa. Alas !

Did not I see the prince dragged from thy presence ?

Phi. Thine eyes deceived thee not.

Isa. Thy only son ?

Phi. Does my wife tremble and wax pale to see it ?

Isa. I tremble !

Phi. And 'tis not without a cause.

Thy trembling . . . is . . . to me . . . no light assurance . . .

Of thy affection . . . For thy husband . . . fear'st thou ?

But reassure thy heart, the peril's vanished.

Isa. Peril ? . . . and how ?

Phi. Peril most imminent :

But now my life is in security.

Isa. Thy life ? . . .

Phi. To thee so dear, and so essential,
Is safe.

Isa. The traitor ?

Phi. Shall have punishment
Due to his crime. To infatuated pity
Think not that I again shall yield my heart.
That time is past ; and now I hear alone
The austere and importuning voice of justice.

Isa. What is the plot ?

Phi. Oh, Heaven ! perhaps I alone
Was not its object. He who thirsts to shed
The life-blood of a father, if he hate
His father's wife, as much as he hates him,
Would little scruple, by one master stroke,
To end both lives at once.

Isa. My life ? what say'st thou ?
Alas ! The prince . . .

Phi. Ungrateful as he is,
Forgets no less thy benefits than mine.

But thou return to whence thou cam'st ; live happy,
And leave to me the important trust t'assure
Thy peace and mine at once.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Isabella.

Isa. What accents, what an aspect ! I am palsied,
And scarcely can tell where or what I am !
What did he say ? what did he not say ? ah !
Has he my love detected ? no, no ; that
Yet in the inmost chambers of my breast
In safety lies. Yet what a piercing look,
Flashing with indignation, he fixed on me !
Alas ! he afterwards did speak to me
Of father's wife . . . what said he of my peace ?
What said I in reply ? Named I the prince ?
Oh, what cold horror shoots through all my veins !
Where is he gone ? and what does he project ?
Meanwhile what am I doing ? I will try
To follow him : but, oh ! the power is wanting.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Gomez, Isabella.

Gom. Pardon my too great boldness ; but I sought,
And here expected to have found, the king.

Isa. He quitted me this instant.

Gom. I'm compell'd
To seek him then elsewhere. Undoubtedly
He feels impatient the event to know.

Isa. Event ? a moment stay : say what thou mean-
est . . .

Gom. If thou hast spoken to him, he has told thee
His doubtful expectation of the sentence
About to be pronounced.

Isa. No: but to me,
He, in obscure and most ambiguous terms,
Hinted of treason.

Gom. Did he not tell thee, then,
The traitor's name?

Isa. The prince...

Gom. Thou know'st it all.
I from the council come...

Isa. What council? whence?
Alas! what tidings dost thou bring to him?

Gom. The mighty business was discuss'd at length,
And with one voice at length it was concluded.

Isa. What? Speak?...

Gom. 'Tis written in this scroll—the sentence.]
The royal signature alone is wanting.

Isa. The tenor of it then...

Gom. Is death.

Isa. Assassins!

Death? and of what offence is he convicted?

Gom. Did, then, the king conceal it from thee?

Isa. Yes.

He spoke it not.

Gom. Th' offence of parricide.

Isa. Carlos! oh, heavens!

Gom. The father is the accuser.

Isa. The father? ... and what proofs can he ad-
duce?

False proofs. Ah, surely, there are other crimes
From me concealed. Tell me his real trespass.

Gom. His real trespass? If thou dost not know it,

Can I reveal it to thee? Such incaution
Might risk my life.

Isa. Alas! what dost thou say?
Art apprehensive that I shall betray thee?

Gom. Further disclosure would betray the king.
But whence arises such an anxious wish
To investigate the truth?

Isa. I? . . . I am urged
By curiosity alone.

Gom. But tell me,
What interest hast thou in this transaction?
In imminent danger is the prince, perhaps
Will fall a victim to it. But to him
What tie, save that of father's wife, can bind thee?
Thy interests are not injured by his death.
Rather to children who from thee may spring
It clears the passage to the throne. Attend.
In part, at least, of Carlos's transgressions,
The first, and real origin, is love.

Isa. What say'st thou?

Gom. Love, with which the king beholds thee.
Yes, it would please him far more to behold
A son of thine inheriting his throne,
Than e'er to see his successor in Carlos.

Isa. I breathe again. What base regards in me
Presum'st thou to imagine?

Gom. I presume
The feelings of my monarch to express:
They are not, no, such are not mine; but I . . .

Isa. 'Tis true, then, that which I could ne'er suspect,
The father . . . yes, the father . . . hates his son?

Gom. Ah, lady, how much do I pity thee,

If thou hast, hitherto, so little known
The king.

Isa. But, ah ! in whom then may I trust ?
Thou perhaps . . .

Gom. Since pity I behold in thee,
That profound silence which oppresses me
For once I lay aside. 'Tis too, too true,
The prince is guilty of no other crime
But that of being son of such a father.

Isa. Thou mak'st me shudder.

Gom. I am stricken, lady,
With no less horror than thyself. Dost know
Whence this unnatural hate derives its source ?
From envy.—Philip's simulated virtue
Cannot endure th' upbraiding spectacle
Of undissembled virtue in a son.

Too great a contrast to himself he sees him ;
And, impious in his envy, he prefers
To that superiority his death.

Isa. Unnatural father ! but since it condemns
To death the guiltless, I esteem the council
More guilty than the king.

Gom. To such a king
What council could oppose itself ? Th' accuser
Sits on the throne : the accusation's false :
Each knows this ; but each, trembling for himself,
Silent in mercy's cause, affirms its truth ;
On us the blot of guilty judgment falls ;
Vile instruments of cruelty in power—
Shuddering we are so : but in vain we shudder ;
He who dared question what the monarch wishes,
Would quickly fall a victim of his vengeance.

Isa. Can that be truth which now I hear ? struck
dumb

Am I with blank astonishment. No hope
Doth there remain? Must he unjustly perish?

Gom. The monarch in profound dissimulation
More than in aught is skilled. He will affect
To hesitate at first; a vain display
Of pity and of grief will doubtless make,
Perhaps for a time procrastinate decision.
Fool will he be, that, in that well-feigned struggle,
Believes that real grief or pity enter;
That in that heart, because it may delay,
Profound resentment swerves from its fix'd purpose.

Isa. Ah! if thou have not equally with him
Thy soul by crimes indurated, do thou,
Ah, do thou, Gomez, be compassionate.

Gom. What can I do?

Isa. Perchance . . .

Gom. With fruitless tears,
But carefully concealed, I may embalm
The memory of that murdered innocent.
More I cannot perform.

Isa. Of such dire guilt,
Who ever saw, who ever heard, a deed?

Gom. If it were possible to save the prince,
Prompt would I be to sacrifice myself;
To this bear witness, Heaven: With fell remorse
In all its bitterness, the consequence
Of fatal friendship with so dark a tyrant,
My bosom with excruciating pangs
Is gnaw'd; but . . .

Isa. If it be sincere in thee,
This deep remorse, thou mayest befriend him still;
Yes, thou may'st do it, and not risk thyself.
The king suspects thee not; thou may'st afford him

Means of escape clandestinely : and who
Th' assistance would betray ? Nay, who can tell
But that in future moments of compunction,
Philip, the generous boldness may reward
Of one, that saved his glory and his son.

Gom. And if, perchance, I dared do this, think'st
thou

That Carlos would consent ? How proud he is
Thou knowest. Already I foresee his rage,
In hearing only the mere name of flight
And sentence. Ah ! each messenger of death,
That haughty and unconquerable nature
Would seek in vain t'intimidate. E'en now
I see him obstinately bent on death.
Further, all counsel and all aid from me
Would be at once suspicious and offensive.
He deems me the confederate of the king.

Isa. Is there no other obstacle ? Contrive
For me to see him ; to his prison guide me :
Thou surely hast access ; I fondly hope
To persuade him to flight. Refuse me not
A favour so immense. As yet the night
Is not far spent. Meanwhile do thou the means
For his escape prepare ; do thou delay
The presentation of the fatal sentence,
Which, perhaps, the king doth not expect so soon.
Thou hearest, . . . Do not disappoint my prayers ;
In such a cause the heavens shall be propitious :
I do conjure thee to exert thyself.

Gom. Who could refuse so merciful an office ?
At all events the effort will I make.

Advance. The heavens suffer not to perish,
Except those victims who deserve to perish.

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Carlos.

Car. What have I now to hope, what fear, but death?

Ah, might I have it free from infamy!
 But from the cruelty of Philip's nature,
 Fraught with contrivances, I must expect it,
 T' increase its infamy. One doubt alone,
Far worse than any death, afflicts my heart,
Perhaps he knows my love: Erewhile I saw,
 In the fierce lightnings of his countenance,
 I know not what of bitterness, that seemed,
 Spite of himself, his meaning to betray...
 His conversation with the queen erewhile...
 His summons to myself; th' observing look...
 His scrutinizing keenness... what forebode they?...
 Oh, Heaven! what would her fate be should his wife
 Excite the wrath of his suspicious nature?
 Perhaps even now the cruel tyrant wreaks
 Vengeance on her for an uncertain fault;
Vengeance that always, from a lawless despot,
Precedes the misdemeanour. But if to all,
 And almost to ourselves, our love's unknown,
 Whence should he learn it? Have my sighs perchance
 Betray'd my meaning? What? Shall love's soft sighs
 Be by a guilty tyrant understood?...
To make him furious and unnatural,
Say was it needful to a sire like this
To penetrate my love? His vengeful hate

Had reached its height, and could not brook delay.
 The day at length is come, the day is come
 When I may satisfy his thirst for blood.
 Ah! treacherous troops of friends that crowded round
 me

In my prosperity! where are ye now?
 I only ask of you a sword; a sword, — *— sword*
 By means of which t' escape from infamy,
 Not one of you will bring me . . . whence that noise?
 The iron gate grates on its hinges! Ah!
 What next may I expect? Who comes there? Ho!

SCENE THE SECOND.

Isabella, Carlos.

Car. Queen, is it thou? Who was thy guide?
 What cause

Hither conducted thee? Love, duty, pity?
 How did'st thou gain admission?

Isa. Wretched prince,
 Thou know'st not yet the horrors of thy fate.
 Thou as a parricide art stigmatized.
 Thy sire himself accuses thee; to death
 A mercenary council hath condemn'd thee;
 Nothing is wanting to complete the sentence
 But the assent of Philip.

Car. Is that all—
 That soon will follow.

Isa. Art thou not o'erwhelm'd?

Car. 'Tis long since nought but death has been
 my choice.

Thou know'st it well, of whom I nothing asked
 But leave to breathe my last where thou didst dwell.

'Tis hard—the horrible aspersion—hard!
Not unexpected. I'm compell'd to die;
And can I shudder if thou bring the tidings?

Isa. Ah! if thou love me, do not talk of death.
Yet, for a short time, to th' emergency...

Car. Yield!... now I fear that thou hast under-
taken

The cruel office to degrade my nature.
My vengeful father hath deputed thee...

Isa. And canst thou think it, prince, that I am
then

The minister of Philip's cruelty?...

Car. He may to this constrain thee, perhaps de-
ceive thee.

But wherefore then has he permitted thee
To see me in this dungeon?

Isa. Thinkest thou

That Philip knows it? That indeed were death.

Car. What say'st thou? Nothing can escape his
knowledge.

Who dares to violate his fierce commands?

Isa. Gomez.

Car. Oh, then, we are utterly undone!
What an abominable, fatal name
Hast thou pronounced!...

Isa. Thou deem'st of him unjustly.
He is not thy enemy.

Car. If I believed
He were my friend, my countenance would burn
With shame, more than with anger.

Isa. He alone
Feels pity for thy fate: to me confessed
Philip's atrocious plot.

Car. Incautious queen !
Thou art too credulous ! what hast thou done ?
Why didst thou trust to such a feigned compassion ?
Of th' impious king most impious minister,
If he spoke truth, 'twas with the truth to cheat thee.

Isa. What could it profit him ? Of his compassion
Undoubted proofs I quickly can display,
If thou wilt yield to my entreaties. He
By stealth conducted me to this recess ;
Prepares the means of thy escape : 'twas I
That influenced him. No longer tarry, fly !
Fly from thy father, fly from death and me !

Car. While thou hast time, ah, hasten from my
presence.

Gomez, without his reasons, feigned not pity.
Into what snare art fallen ! Now, oh queen,
Indeed I shudder ! Now what doubt remains ?
The secret of our love he knows it all—
The king—the cruel king !

Isa. Ah, no ! erewhile
Philip I saw, when, from his presence, thou,
By dint of force, wert dragg'd. He burn'd with rage.
Trembling I listened to him, not exempt
From fears like thine. But when in solitude
His converse I recall'd, I felt secure,
That, rather than of this, his fury taxed thee
With every other crime. To sum up all,
He charged thee, in connection with his own,
Of thirsting for my blood.

Car. 'Twould be a toil
That made me vile as he, yea, e'en more vile,
The dark perplexities to penetrate
Of guilt's inextricable labyrinth.

But, sure I am, that this thy embassy
Conceals some bad design. That which till now
He but suspected, by this deed of thine
He hopes to bring to a more certain proof.
But, be it what it may, quickly depart
From this disastrous place. Thy hope is vain,
Vain thy belief that Gomez wills to serve me,
Or, if he willed it, that I should consent.

Isa. And must I then drag on my wretched days
Midst beings such as these? . . .

Car. 'Tis too, too true!

Delay not now a moment: leave me; save me
From agonies insufferably keen!
Thy pity wounds me, since for thyself it feels not . . .
Go, if thou hold life dear . . .

Isa. Life dear to me!

Car. My honour, then, preserve it, and thy fame.

Isa. And in such danger must I quit thee thus?

Car. Ah, what avails it to expose thyself?

Thyself thou ruinest, and sav'st not me.

Virtue is spotted even by suspicion.

Ah! from the tyrant snatch the hellish joy

Of casting imputation on thy name.

Go—dry thy tears—and still thy heaving bosom.

With a dry eye, and an intrepid brow,

Hear of my death! To virtue's cause devote

The mournful days in which thou shalt outlive me.

And if among so many guilty creatures

Thou seekest consolation, one remains;

Perez, thou know'st him well, clandestinely

Will weep with thee. To him sometimes speak of me.

But go—depart! Ah, tempt me not to weep . . .

Tear not my heart little by little thus!

I cannot bear it. Now farewell for ever !
I've need to summon all my fortitude
To meet the hour of ignominious death.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Philip, Isabella, Carlos.

Phi. Perfidious wretch ! that hour of death is
come ;

I bring it to thee.

Isa. Are we thus betrayed ?

Car. I am prepared for death. Give it at once.

Phi. Wretch, thou shalt die ! but first, ye impious
pair,

My fulminating accents hear, and tremble !

Impious pair ! long, long, I've known it all.

That horrid flame that burns in you with love,

In me with fury, long has fix'd its torment,

And long been all discover'd ! Oh, what pangs

Of rage repress'd ! Oh, what resentment smother'd !

At last ye both are fallen in my power.

Should I lament ? or deign to express regret ?

No ! I for vengeance thirsted ! and I now

Will in illimitable vengeance revel,

Quick, unexampled vengeance ! On your shame

Meanwhile I feast my eyes. Flagitious dame,

Think not I ever bore thee any love ;

Nor that a jealous thought within my heart

E'er woke a pang. Philip could never deign

On a degraded bosom, such as thine,

To fix th' affections of his lofty nature ;

Nor could a lady who deserved betray them.

Thou hast in me thy king offended, then,

And not thy lover. Thou, unworthily,
 Hast thus, my consort's name, that sacred name,
 Basely contaminated. I never prized
 Thy love : but such inviolable duty
 Thou should'st have felt towards thy lord and king,
 As should have made thee e'en at a frail thought
 Shudder with horror.—Thou, seducer vile,
 To thee I speak not. Guilt becomes thy nature :
 The deed was worthy of its impious author.
 There wanted not indubitable proofs,
 Although concealed your criminal regard.
 Your silence, and your gestures, and the grief
 Pent up alike in both your impious hearts,
 I watched them all. Now what more shall I say ?
 Equal in crimes, your torments shall be equal.

Car. What do I hear ? There is no fault in her :
 No fault ? not e'en the shadow of a fault !
 Pure is her heart, with such flagitious flame
 It never burned, I swear. She scarcely knew
 My love—the trespass then . . .

Phi. To what extent
 Ye, each of you, are criminal, I know.
 I know, as yet, that to thy father's bed
 Thou hast not raised thy bold and impious thoughts.
 Had it been otherwise, would'st thou now live ?
 But from thy impure mouth there issued accents,
 Flagitious accents, of incestuous love.
 She heard them : that suffices . . .

Car. I alone
 Offended thee : I seek not to conceal it.
 A rapid flash of hope athwart my sight
 Shot—but her virtue instantly dispell'd it.
 She heard me, but 'twas only to my shame :

Only to root entirely from my bosom
The illegitimate passion that it fostered . . .
Yes, now, alas ! too illegitimate . . .
Yet it was once a lawful, noble passion :
She was my spouse betrothed—my spouse, thou
 know'st—
Thou gav'st her to me ; and the gift was lawful,
But 'twas not lawful in thee to resume it.
Yes, I am criminal in every shape ;
I love her : thou hast made that love a crime . . .
What can'st thou now take from me ? In my blood
Sate thy wrath ; and gratify in me
The exacerbation of thy jealous pride ;
Spare her, for she is wholly innocent.

Phi. She ? Not to thee in guilt she yields, but
 boldness.—

Be silent, lady, of thine own accord.
That silence does sufficiently betray thee.
'Tis useless to deny it, thou dost cherish
An illegitimate passion. Thou betray'dst it—
Enough—too much betray'dst it, when I spoke,
With artful purposes, of him to thee :
Why then didst thou so pertinaciously
Remind me that he was my son ? Oh, traitress,
Thou dared'st not, yet rather should'st have said,
He was thy lover. Hast thou less than he,
Dost thou imagine, in thy secret heart,
Betrayed thy duty, honour, and the laws ?

Isa. My silence from my fear does not arise ;
But from the stupor that benumbs my senses
At the incredible duplicity
Of thy blood-thirsty, ravening heart. At length
My scatter'd senses I once more recover.

'Tis time, 'tis time, that for the heinous fault
I should atone, of being wife to thee.
Till now I've not offended thee. Till now,
In God's sight, in the prince's, I am guiltless.
Although within my breast . . .

Car. Pity for me
Inspires her words : ah, hear her not . . .

Isa. In vain
Thou triest to save me. Every word of thine
Is as a puncture, which exasperates
The wounds of his proud breast. The time is past
For palliatives. To shun his hated sight,
The torment of whose presence nought can equal,
Is now my only refuge. Were it given
To one that is a tyrant e'er to feel
The power of love, I would remind thee, king,
That thou at first didst form our mutual ties,
That, from my earliest years, my fondest thoughts,
My dearest hopes, were centred all in him ;
With him I trusted to live blessed and blessing.
To love him then, at once, in me was virtue,
And to thy will submission. Who but thou
Made what was virtue guilt ? Thou didst the deed.
Ties the most holy thou didst burst asunder,—
An easy task to one that's absolute.
But does the heart change thus ? His image lay
Deeply engraven there. But instantly
That I became thy wife the flame was smothered.
And I depended afterwards on time,
And on my virtue, wholly to surmount it ;
And, peradventure, more than e'en on these
Depended on thyself.

Phi. I will then now,

What neither years, nor virtue, have perform'd,
Do instantly : yes, in thy faithless blood
I'll quench the impure flame.

Isa. Yes, to spill blood,
And, when that blood is spilled, to spill more blood,
Is thy most choice prerogative : but, oh !
Is it by a prerogative like this
Thou hopest to win me from him to thee ?
To thee, as utterly unlike thy son,
As is, from virtue, vice ? Thou hast been wont
To see me tremble ; but I fear no more ;
My illegitimate passion, for as such
My passion I accounted, I concealed :
Now shall it be without disguise proclaimed,
Since thy dark crimes have made it shew like virtue.

Phi. He is worthy of thee ; thou of him art worthy.
It now remains to prove, if, as in words,
Ye will be bold in death . . .

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Gomez, Philip, Isabella, Carlos.

Phi. Gomez, hast thou
All my commands fulfill'd ? What I enjoined thee
Dost thou now bring ?

Gom. Perez has breathed his last.
Behold the sword, that with his smoking blood
Yet reeks.

Car. Oh sight !

Phi. With him is not extinguished
The race of traitors . . . Be thou witness now
How I take vengeance on this impious pair.

Car. Before I die, alas ! how many deaths

I'm destined to behold. Thou, Perez, too? . . .
 Oh, infamy! now, now I follow thee.
 Where is the sword to which my breast is fated?
 Quick, bring it to me. May my blood alone,
 Of this fell tyger, slake the burning thirst.

Isa. Oh I, oh I alone can pacify
 His murderous appetite!

Phi. Cease your vile contest.
 This dagger, and this cup, await your choice.
 Thou, proud contemner as thou art, of death,
 Chuse first.

Car. Oh, weapon of deliverance,
 With innocent blood yet reeking, thee I chuse!—
 Oh, luckless lady, thou hast said too much:
 For thee no refuge now remains but death:
 But, ah! the poison chuse, for this will be
 Most easy . . . Of my inauspicious love
 The last sad proof is this. Collect at once
 All, all thy fortitude; and look on me.¹
 I die . . . do thou now follow my example . . .
 Bring, bring the fatal cup . . . do not delay . . .

Isa. Ah, yes, I follow thee. Oh, Death, to me
 Thou art most welcome; in thee . . .

Phi. Thou shalt live,
 Spite of thyself, shalt live.

Isa. Ah, let me die;
 Excruciating lot! he dies, and I . . .

Phi. Severed from him shalt live; live days of
 woe:

Thy lingering grief will be a joy to me.
 And when at last, recovered from thy love,

¹ He stabs himself.

Carlos goes to the dagger. He chooses the dagger and poison to drink the poison because he knows that true love is more

Thou wishest to live on, I, then, will kill thee.

Isa. Live in thy presence ! I support thy sight !
No, that shall never be ! My doom is fixed . .
The cup refused, thy dagger may replace it.¹

Phi. Stop ! . . .

Isa. It is done ! . . .

Phi. Heavens, what do I behold ?

Isa. Thou seest thy wife . . . thy son . . . both innocent . . .

And both by thy hands slain . . . I follow thee,
Loved Carlos.

Phi. What a stream of blood runs here,
And of what noble blood . . . Behold I have
Obtained an ample, and a horrid vengeance ; . . .
But am I happy ? Gomez, do thou hide
The dire catastrophe from all the world.
If thou art but discreet, thou wilt preserve
To me my fame, and to thyself thy life.

¹ She darts most rapidly towards the dagger of Philip, and stabs herself with it.

POLINICES.

A TRAGEDY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ETEOCLES.

ANTIGONE.

POLINICES.

Guards of Eteocles.

CREON.

Priests.

JOCASTA.

People.

SCENE,—The Palace in Thebes.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Jocasta, Antigone.

Joc. Thou only now of my unhappy offspring,
Antigone, thou only triest to bring
Some consolation to my mortal grief.
Yet, notwithstanding, thou dost owe thy life
To the incestuous king. Thy qualities
Would make one doubt the horrors of thy birth.
Mother of Œdipus, and wife of Œdipus,
The name of parent only makes me shudder.
Yet, when thou call'st me by the name of mother,
There is, I know not what, that soothes my soul.
Oh, that I dared to call my sons thy brethren!
Oh, that I dared my guilty voice to raise
To the immortal gods! I would implore
That they on my devoted head alone
Would hurl the shafts of their unerring vengeance.

Ant. Alas ! the gods have ceased to pity us
The gods themselves abhor us. *Ædipus* !
It is a name that of itself suffices
To blast our fated race ; we were defiled,
Tainted with guilt, ere yet we saw the light !
Were reprobated long before our birth . . .
Mother, why weep'st thou now ? When we were
born
Thou rather shouldst have wept. Didst thou then see
Nothing of what the future should bring forth ?
Brethren at once, and sons, *Eteocles*
And *Polinices*, yet have scarcely given
Proofs of their characters.

Joc. To *Ædipus*
They hitherto have shown but little pity ;
Display'd unnatural hatred towards each other.
'Gainst their flagitious mother, why have they,
With better reason, not turn'd all their rage ?
Inadequate to my enormous guilt,
No other punishment have I to bear
Than feelings of remorse. I fill the throne,
The genial light of Heaven visits these eyes,
While *Ædipus*, unfortunate, yet guiltless,
Deprived of sight, covered with infamy,
Neglected lies ; and e'en his very sons
Abandon him ; by their means is he thus
Constrained to shudder with a double horror,
That he of his own brethren is the father.

Ant. And dost thou think thy sufferings are light
Compared with those of *Ædipus* ? Though he,
From grisly caverns, mad with grief and rage,
A thousand times a day entreat for death ;
Although his sight be gone, for ever gone,

Quench'd in an everlasting night of tears,
 Yet less than thee do I account him wretched.
 He will know nothing of the spectacle,
 That in this realm will be too soon displayed ;
 Or, if he know, he will not as thou wilt,
 With his paternal eyes behold th' impure,
 The impious, and the reprobated remnant
 Of our devoted race, destroy each other.
 Between the brethren hate is at its height ;
 And 'twould be difficult to say, if thirst
 For blood or power most vehemently rages.

Joc. I see it . . . I ? . . . the brethren fight ? oh,
 Heaven,

I hope to see it never. I alone
 Am thus enabled to support my life,
 By the desire which in my breast I feel,
 The warm desire, and the aspiring hope,
 To stifle with my tears, that which, alas !
 'Twixt my exasperated sons now burns,
 The fatal flame of discord . . .

Ant. Dost thou hope it ?

Oh, mother ! one the sceptre is, and two
 Are the competitors. What can'st thou hope ?

Joc. That the alternate oath will be observed.

Ant. That oath both swore : but one alone has
 kept it.

He from the throne is banished. Swoll'n with pride,
 Perjured Eteocles now fills that throne,
 And reaps the harvest of his breach of faith.
 But Polinices, forced from foreign states
 Assistance to solicit, to his wrath
 Will set no bounds, if he the sceptre gain not ;
 And will Eteocles to force concede

That sceptre, which, by force, he may retain ?

Joc. They have a mother . . . to my mediation
Will not their fury yield ? Ah, rob me not
Of my last hope ! Although, as fame reports,
The Argian king advances with his troops
To aid the cause of exiled Polinices,
And to reclaim his violated rights ;
And though Eteocles, inflamed with pride,
Still obstinately keeps the Theban throne,
Yet in my tears, and in my indignation,
And in the anguish of a mother's bosom,
There is a power to bring them both to reason.
My loud reproach Eteocles shall hear
For broken faith, and violated oaths ;
And Polinices shall be told, and tremble,
That the same Thebes which he now aims t'assault
Witnessed his birth, and was his infant home.
What more ? If they compel me, they shall hear me
Asseverate the opprobrium of their birth,
And swear that ere their swords attack each other,
Those swords shall find a passage through my breast.

Ant. Alas ! If I a hope could entertain
'Twould be in him that's banished from the throne :
His was the milder nature ; nor his heart
Can by long exile be so much depraved,
As is his brother's by long use of power.

Joc. Thou deem'st most highly of the exiled brother ?

Yet has Eteocles, as he has done,
The bounds of filial duty not transgress'd ;
Without my leave not form'd a strange alliance ;
Nor had recourse to the enemies of Thebes.

Ant. He has not had, oh mother, to endure

Long exile, perilous adversity,
And broken compacts. Soon, too soon, oh mother!
Whose is the better nature we shall witness.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Eteocles, Jocasta, Antigone.

Ete. Behold, at last, that Polinices comes ;
He comes, who so exclusively engrosses
A mother's partial, fond solicitude.
Not as he went from Thebes shalt thou behold him,
Alone, an exile, and a wanderer ;
Not as he saw me on that day return
To claim from him the covenanted throne.
He returns to us with a proud array
Of powerful enemies : in arms he seeks
From his own brother the ancestral sceptre :
Anxious and ready he displays himself
To burn to ashes these paternal walls,
These sacred temples, and these household gods,
This palace, in which, first, the breath of life,
An infant, he inhaled ; this, that contains
His father, and his mother, and his brethren,
And all that he should hold most dear and sacred.
He hath thus sacrilegiously referred
All law, all hope, all reason, to the sword.

Joc. Then true is the report ? Oh, Heavens, in arms
To his paternal soil !

Ete. He has forsworn
The Theban name ; he is become an Argive.
To him his daughter hath Adrastes given,
And he will give him Thebes. From yon high tower,
If thou art disposed to see it, go, and witness

How he hath trodden down his native soil.
Thou wilt from thence, e'en on our lands, behold
His gaudy banners floating on the breeze,
And, with arm'd strangers, see the outstretched
plain,

As by a bursting torrent, overwhelmed.

Joc. Have I not often told thee, that to this
By dint of force thou drov'st him? . . .

Ete. Of my brother
The first assailant thou shalt not behold me :
I only shall secure the walls of Thebes.

Ant. He quarrels not with Thebes. He seeks
alone
To gain by arms a throne to prayers denied.

Ete. Commands, they were not prayers. Oppro-
brious,
Unjust commands, which I refused to obey.
And I, assuredly not used to obedience,
Possess the throne. Since he will have it so,
Himself absolves me from the plighted faith.
The abominable tie that he has formed
With the enemies of Thebes, has, of itself,
All antecedent covenants dissolved.

Joc. He is my son, in spite of what he has done.
Such I esteem him ; and moreover hope
To make him yet esteem thee as a brother.
I mean forthwith his fury to confront,
And meet him on the plain. Meantime do thou . . .

SCENE THE THIRD.

Creon, Eteocles, Jocasta, Antigone.

Cre. Whither, oh sister, dost thou bend thy steps ?
The paths are intercepted : and the gates
Of Thebes are closed 'gainst the besieging foes.
The walls with armed men on every side
Encompass'd ; horrid sight ! Before the rest,
A bow-shot from the troops, comes Polinices
Towards the city gates, all unattended.
The vizor of his helmet raised, he spreads
Towards us one powerless hand, and with the other
Bends towards the earth the point of his drawn sword.
With gesture such as this, audaciously
Admission for himself, and not for others,
Within the walls of Thebes he challenges ;
Invokes his mother's name, and makes profession
Of an impatient wish to ask her blessing.

Ete. This is a new wish truly ! with drawn swords
T'invoke the embrace of an offended mother.

Joc. But didst thou not, oh Creon, first exhort him
His arms to lay aside ? My inmost mind
Is known to thee. Full well thou art assured
I could not see, much less embrace a son,
Who comes with sword in hand to brave his brother.

Cre. His words breathe nothing but respect and
peace.
Nor do his troops with military license
Run through our fields : From the resounding bow
The barbed arrow has not hissed through air ;
Nor has an Argive weapon tasted yet
A drop of Theban blood. On their swords' hilt

Their right hands rest immoveable ; each warrior
Is sway'd by Polinices ; thou might'st hear
A confused murmur through the camp, which cries,
“ Peace to the Thebans, and to Thebes.”

Ete. Indeed !

This most assuredly will be to you
An honourable peace. Does then my brother
'Gainst me alone this enterprise prepare ?
'Tis well : and I alone accept the challenge.

Ant. But, notwithstanding, if he speak of peace,
Let us first hear him . . .

Joc. Let him be admitted
Alone within the gates : I will speak with him ;
Nor can'st thou interdict it.

Cre. If he bring
No treacherous influence with him—but I fear—

Ant. His soul's a stranger to the arts of treason.

Ete. Truly thou know'st him well ! It seems to me
That thou art acquainted with his inmost mind.
Perhaps you concur in thoughts as well as words.

Joc. Alas ! my son, how in these bitter accents
Thy malice ill-disguised breaks forth ! To Thebes,
Ah, let him come, and come to my embrace ;
There lay his weapons down. Let us, meanwhile,
Go to the temple, and implore for peace.
And did he ask for me ? Beloved son,
'Tis a long time since I beheld thee last !
In me alone perhaps ; in my immense,
Impartial, and maternal love, has he,
E'en more than in his troops, reposed his hope.
He is indeed my son ; he is thy brother :
Betwixt you I alone am arbitress.
For a few moments banish from thy mind

The thoughts of how he has returned to Thebes ;
Remember only how he went from thence ;
How many years, in spite of thy pledged faith,
Through Greece he wandered : contemplate in him
A prince, a suffering exile, and thy brother.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Eteocles, Creon.

Ete. With menaces this Polinices hopes
To bring me to submission, and degrade me ?
What boldness ! To my palace unattended
He comes, as if to mock me ! Perhaps he deems
That all is gain'd when he appears in person ?

Cre. All this I apprehended from the day
That, in the name of Polinices, came,
Claiming the covenanted Theban throne,
The bold Tideus. The fierce menaces,
The contumelious carriage, which he join'd
To the request, sufficiently convinced me
Of Polinices' sinister designs.
He feigned pretexts whence he might snatch from
thee

The common throne for ever. 'Tis now clear
He wishes for it never to restore it :
Cost what it may he wishes for it now ;
E'en though the impious path that leads to it
Were with the last drop of thy blood defiled.

Ete. Assuredly, he now will be compelled
To drink that blood e'en to the latest drop :
For my existence and my throne are one.
Shall I indeed become the willing subject,
And swear allegiance to a hated brother ?

Hated indeed ; but still more scorned than hated.
I, who now see none equal to myself?
I should be vile, if from that altitude
I could a moment e'en in thought descend.
From the throne's height a king should never fall
But with the throne itself. He cannot find,
Except beneath its venerable ruins,
A worthy sepulchre, a worthy death.

Cre. I see, oh king, with exultation, see,
In thee, the lofty valour live again
Of thy magnanimous progenitors.
By thee the name of son of *Ædipus*,
Clear'd of all stain, will reassume its lustre.
A conquering monarch, to posterity
No other recollection shall he leave
Than that of his achievements.

Ete. But, alas !

I have not conquered yet.

Cre. Thou art deceived ;

— Already, by not fearing, thou hast conquer'd.

Ete. What avails flattery ? I am so beset,
That, amid war's vicissitudes, to me
Nothing is left secure, except my courage ;
Nothing is left to hope, except revenge.

Cre. Thou hitherto art king : I first here swear,
For all thy subjects, for myself, to thee
Inviolable faith. Rather than serve
Thy hated brother, we will all here spend
To the last drop our life-blood. On the traitor,
Should impious fortune smile, he shall alone
Reign o'er the ashes of what once was Thebes.
But, perhaps, if pity for thy faithful subjects
Influence thy breast, thou wilt retract thy purpose

Of open war. Ah, let him only perish
Who plots against thy life! thy safety wills it,
And more than this, the safety of the state.
A brother's death may to a brother seem
Perhaps too cruel; but ferocious war,
Protracted war, can that indeed appear
Less cruel to a sovereign? less unjust?

Ete. What do I wish for else, or what else hope,
To what do I more ardently aspire,
Than to oppose my brother man to man?
This hatred is commensurate with my life,
And its indulgence more than life I prize.

Cre. Thy life? Dost thou not know it? That is
ours.

'Tis true, that valour cannot find a seat
More noble than the bosom of a king:
But oughtest thou t'oppose to treason's wiles
An open valour? Is he not a traitor?
What brings him now to Thebes? With sword in
hand,

Why should he speak of peace? Or why invoke
His mother? Perhaps he comes here to seduce her?
His impious sister is already his.
Truly great plots are hatching. Wilt thou not
Defeat such fraudulent contrivances?

Ete. Ah, doubt it not! if long he tarry here
'Twill be to his misfortune. If he live,
To flight he'll be indebted for his life:
I would not trust his death to other hands.
To mine alone 'tis due. And say, what rage,
Like mine, will penetrate that stubborn breast?

Cre. Ah! to secure a more consummate vengeance,
Suspend awhile thy too impatient hate.

Ete. The means most fatal, fierce, and manifest,
Alone please me.

Cre. Yet perhaps thou wilt be forced
T' adopt the most conceal'd . . . Thy brother comes
Powerful in arms.

Ete. Thebes also has her warriors.

Cre. Yet has Adrastes many more : The war
Too unexpectedly comes on us. Ah !
We can but die fighting beneath thy banners.

Ete. But why speak I of warriors ? I am one,
One also is my brother.

Cre. Dost thou hope
To defy him ? His mother, sister, all, . . .
Around him flocking . . .

Ete. But my trusty sword,
Cannot it clear a passage to his person ?

Cre. And with the effort thou wouldst lose thy
fame.

Such an excess would be condemned in Thebes.

Ete. And does not Thebes blame fraud ?

Cre. That fraud would be
From all concealed, or partially discovered.
And if a king appear not criminal,
It is enough . . . Thy brother was th' aggressor . . .
Do thou, by management, make him appear
Still to continue such . . .

Ete. What management ?
I understand thee not.

Cre. Upon myself
I take the whole affair : Repose in me :
And listen only to my counsel. Thou
In time shalt know it all. First it behoves us
To make him trust to simulated peace.

Do thou so well this stratagem confirm,
That he, without the Argives, may consent
To tarry here in Thebes. Then 'twill be easy
To make the traitor treacherously perish.

Ete. Provided that he perish, and I reign,
A little longer I'll constrain myself
To keep my hatred and my fury pent
Within my bosom.

Cre. I will circulate
With art the cry of peace ; to peace proposed
Do thou consent with a well-feign'd reluctance :
'Twill be thy interest to-day to cheat
Both friends and foes alike. But, above all,
From the solicitous bosom of thy mother
Be e'en the shadow of suspicion banished.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Jocasta, Creon.

Cre. Ah, put an end to thy perpetual tears !
This day, that seemed the harbinger of slaughter,
Will not, perhaps, be finished, ere we see
Thebes blest with lasting peace. I have inspired
Within the bosom of Eteocles
Such horror of this sacrilegious war,
That, in his mind, he almost has resolved
To re-establish violated faith ;
Provided that his brother can convert
His menaces to prayers.

Joc. Yes, yes, to-day
The brothers' enmity will have an end ;

But what will be that end? It is recorded
— By the stern fates, and only known to Heaven.
Ah, with thy flatteries may the event agree!
This is my only hope before I die! . . .
Thou couldst, then, somewhat to pacific thoughts
Soften the stern mind of Eteocles?
I will believe thee. But, there yet remains
Th' embitter'd bosom of my exiled son
To sooth. I will shed tears; for now, alas!
I can do little more: I will exhaust
Threats and entreaties; but thou knowest well
That I am not, as others are, a mother;
Nor reason warrants that I should expect
That filial reverence which I merit not.

Cre. Must I again entreat thee to be calm?
Desires for concord, more sincere, were never
Witnessed amid such warlike preparations.
Behold Eteocles; ah, consummate,
By pious art, the peaceful dispositions,
To which, already, I have wrought his soul!

SCENE THE SECOND.

Jocasta, Eteocles.

Joc. The day is come, oh son, in which both thou
And Polinices, in a mother's presence,
Your cause dispassionately must arbitrate.
Nature betwixt you constitutes me judge.
I, more than any one, can make thy heart
Thrill with the mention of a brother's name,
That sacred name which thou no more regardest.

Ete. Does he regard it better than myself?
He is a brother, as he is a citizen;

A brother, as he is a son and subject :
His various duties he fulfils alike.

Joc. Each duty, least of all a subject's duty,
Does it become thee now t'enumerate ?
Thy oath expressly makes thee now his vassal ;
Yet I behold the king. Thou shudderest,
In hearing me proclaim thee subject ? Say,
Ah say, is it a more illustrious title
That of a perjured king ?

Ete. A king despised,
Ah, is not that a title more offensive ?
What but his arms emancipate me now
From my pledged oath ? I swore without constraint,
Without constraint will I perform my promise.
How can I ever redemand with boldness
That ill-defended throne, which I have yielded
From abjectness of temper ?

Joc. Thy stern pride,
Thy courage, are sufficiently notorious ;
Establish now thy character for justice.
Make not towards thy brother, I conjure thee,
An ostentation of ferocious virtue !
Rather be generous, pious, and humane ;
No other virtues does a mother wish
To witness in a son : perhaps they seem
Virtues to thee not worthy of a king ?

Ete. Not worthy, no, if they from terror spring.
Brief my discourse shall be : if he can do it,
He, in thy presence, shall his reasons give
For his proceedings. Mother, thou shalt see
That I've a royal soul ; and that I hold
My honour dearer than my life and kingdom.

7 honour

SCENE THE THIRD.

Polinices, Jocasta, Eteocles.

Joc. Oh thou, my long and vainly-wished-for son !
Do I again behold thy face in Thebes ? . . .
At last to my maternal breast I clasp thee.
How much I've wept for thee ! Art thou become
More placable ? Didst thou invoke thy mother ?
Behold her in thy presence ! Dost thou come
Submissively to lay down in her presence
The horrid burthen of fraternal discord ?
Ah ! tell me, com'st thou hither to console me,
Or to cut short my few declining years ?

Pol. Oh, were I, mother, as I wish to be,
The soother of thy griefs ! But, I am such,
That, wheresoe'er I go, I bear with me
The anger of the gods. Already, mother,
I must have cost thee too, too many tears.

Joc. Ah, no ! we will shed tears, but not of grief.
Advance, and hasten to embrace thy brother !
He is my son, and dear to me as thou art :
Speak to him kindly if thou love thy mother ;
Give him thy right-hand ; press him to thy bosom.

Ete. Whither advancest ? Warrior, who art thou ?
Those arms I do not recognise. Perchance,
Art thou my brother ? No, it cannot be ;
For helmet, buckler, sword, and javelin,
Are not th' accoutrements with which a brother
A brother comes to meet.

Pol. And who but thou
Put in my hand these instruments of war ?
The day that Tydeus, in a brother's name,

Came to these thresholds to demand my kingdom,
Say, did he in his right-hand bring the sword,
Or peaceful olive branch? 'Tis true, by day
He was admitted to a conference;
But on the night of his departure hence
A plot was laid insidiously to kill him;
And he had fallen a victim to the snare
Had he not been invincible! Thus warned
By what befell my messenger, I learn,
That, here, grave questions are by arms decided.

Joc. Ah, say not so: hast thou not here a mother?
And since thou hast one, art thou undefended?
Behold thy buckler, 'tis my breast; that form,
That in one day to both of you gave birth:
Ah, throw away thy other useless weapons;
They interfere with our embrace; and say,
Silently say, that thou'rt by foes encompass'd.

Ete. Do not expect from me the pledge of peace,
If first thou do not manifest thy purpose;
If first thou do not make us understand,
Why thou, a subject and a citizen,
Dar'st, as invader, to return to Thebes.

Pol. My right, to him who measures right by force,
I ill could tell, if force did not attend me.
Greece knows my story; dost thou know it not?
I'll tell it thee: thou'st reign'd, but reign'st no
longer.

Ete. Fool! thou shalt know whether I reign or not.

Pol. Thou hitherto hast had the name and sceptre,
But not the fame and honour of a monarch.
I, who am free from perjury, surrendered,
After the year's illapse, to thee my throne:
Didst thou not swear to do the same? I kept

My oath ; do thou keep thine. I come to claim
My heritage ; a brother, if thou yield it ;
But thou shalt find in me, if thou refuse it,
A foe, fierce, cruel, and implacable.
Thus have I told to thee, without disguise,
My resolution. In my righteous cause,
Earth and the sky proclaim themselves. The sky,
Already witness of our mutual oaths,
Will, I believe it, favour this my sword,
And will the perjured punish.

Ete. The just gods
Whom thou invokest thy misdeeds to second,
Abhor fraternal arms : of their revenge,
A signal instance he will be who first
Ventured to grasp them.

Pol. Dar'st thou to recall,
Perfidious wretch, the tie of brotherhood ?
Feel'st thou a horror at it, now that thou
First to fraternal war compellest me ?
But art thou not the same that didst not feel
Horror at perjury ? These impious arms,
The violator of his faith first grasp'd them.
The war is thine ; its guilt is thine alone.

Joc. Ferocious souls, is this your hoped-for peace ?
Ah, hear me, I entreat you . . .

Ete. I am king,
And sit upon the throne ; and here proclaim,
That while Adrastes, and his hated Argives,
Encompass Thebes, I listen to no terms
Of reconciliation, nor endure
Thee in my royal presence.

Pol. And I,
To thee, who dost usurp the throne, reply,

Thyself a king miscalling; yes, I here
Reply, that till thou hast fulfill'd thy oath,
The Argives here shall stay, and I with them.

Ete. Mother, thou hearest him; the recompense
That for his guilt he asks. Why parley further?
What dost thou here? Depart from Thebes this instant!

Pol. Thou shalt again behold me in this place,
But in another guise: to impious foes
Th' inevitable messenger of death.

Joc. Ye only are the impious! Quickly punish,
Of being mother to such impious sons,
The fault in me! Plunge, plunge in me that sword;
My blood too is connatural with yours.

Rivals in guilt, ye sons of *Ædipus*,
Of crime the offspring, and to crime impell'd
By the implacable, avenging furies,
Here, here, your weapons hurl; behold my womb,
The chamber of your infamous conception.
Be not the brother slain, but slain by you
The mother; 'twere a far more venial crime,
And far more worthy of your ravening swords.

Ete. Hold'st thou unjust the terms that I demanded?

Pol. Hold'st thou my want of confidence unfounded?

Joc. And is it then my wrath that is unjust?
Thou'rt not enraged at the demanded sceptre,
But that it is by one in arms demanded?
And for no other cause thou wear'st these weapons,
But to obtain thy sceptre for the year?
Let one resign his sword, the other quit
The sceptre not his own; and if, betwixt you,

I pledge myself as surety for th' observance,
In future, of the covenanted oath,
Who will refuse obedience ? . . .

Ete. I will not.

Mother, thou wilt it ? I will therefore pardon
The outrage 'gainst myself and Thebes committed.
Let him first yield ; he was the first t' assault us.
Soon as our fields are clear'd from yonder troops,
He shall be king. I yield to him the throne.
He shall not take it from me. Can he take it,
While that my veins retain a drop of blood ?
Do thou decide : thou see'st in me compliance :
But, if between us both the peace is broken,
Remember thou'rt alone the guilty cause ;
And may the horrors of disastrous war
Fall, where alone they should fall, on thy head.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Jocasta, Polinices.

Pol. And may thy imprecation be accomplished,
May Heaven shower vengeance on my head, if I
Am not sincere in my desire for peace.

Joc. Beloved son, and may I trust thy words ?

Pol. Mother, I wish to spare the Theban blood,
No wish is dearer to my heart : like me,
Adrastes fain would sheathe the murderous sword.
'Tis true, that, till he saw me in this Thebes,
The ancestral sceptre grasp, he would refuse,
Although I wished it, to return to Argos.

Joc. Alas ! thou wilt not be the first to yield.

Pol. I cannot.

Joc. What prevents thee ?

Pol. Prudence, mother.

Joc. Dost thou not trust in me?

Pol. I trust him not :

He has deceived me once.

Joc. If thou refuse

To free this city from besieging foes,
I shall believe what fame reports of thee,
That thou hast form'd, our ruin to ensure,
Infamous ties of blood with King Adrastes;
And that thou hast demanded of thy father
War, as the fatal dowry of thy marriage.

Pol. Oh cruel fate ! my infant, and my spouse,
On one side emulously rend my heart,
Weeping, and asking bitterly from me,
Their wrested heritage ; on th' other side,
For thee, my mother, deep compassion thrills me,
And for my sick and desolated country ; . . .
Yet, ah reflect ! Thou seest it thyself ;
What would it now avail if I sent back
My warriors ? 'twould not be less manifest,
That if my brother yields, he yields to fear,
And not to my just claims. What will he then
Have gain'd for his proud honour ? Well I know,
That far from hence my force withdrawn he wishes,
Since force alone compels him to be just.

Joc. And thou alone adoptest force, because
It loosens thee from every other pact.

Pol. Mother ! dost thou so little know thy sons ?
Thou know'st full well that we were scarcely born,
Ere hatred, towards me, in his heart took root.
He grew in hatred ; and in every vein
Hatred is mingled with his blood. 'Tis true,
I love him not ; for 'tis impossible

Hate to return with love : but I wish not
To injure him ; so that I do not seem
To bear his scorn, and Greece behold me not
Tamely enduring outrages so vast.

Joc. Hear virtue ! Thou expectest Greece to
prize thee,

Since to a brother, guiltier than thyself,
Thou dost refuse to yield ? The Theban throne,
Of all thy wishes, is the noble object ?
Dost thou not know that here to gain the throne,
Is to gain all that is on earth most wretched ?
Think on thy ancestors, who ever reigned
In Thebes, and was not guilty ! Certainly,
The throne on which sat wretched *Ædipus*
Is worthy of thy envy ! Dost thou fear
That the world should not know that he had sons ?
Say, hast thou virtue ? Leave the throne to guilt.
Wouldst thou take vengeance on thy brother ?
wouldst thou

That he, by Thebes, by Greece, the world, and Heaven,

Be execrated ? Leave him then to reign.
Even I, also born upon the throne,
Disastrous days, amid its empty pomps,
Days of distraction, each obscurer state
The object of my envy, have dragged on !
What other art thou, misadventurous throne,
What other, but an ancient usurpation,
Source of much suffering, and of more abhorrence !
Oh, that I ne'er had fill'd thee, fatal station !
Of *Ædipus*, then had I never been
The mother and the wife ; then had I not
Been the cursed parent of unnatural brothers !

Pol. Mother, thou mortally offendest me !
Deem'st me unfit for my appointed station ?
Ah ! it is not, no, it is not my object
T' impose as laws each transient phantasy,
With hypocritical and insane pride
T' affect resemblance to th' immortal gods ;
The puppetry of super-human greatness,
Though this, by many, may be deemed to reign,
Is not my object. If in happier days
Virtue in me was not a vain pretence,
Now, in my adverse ones, be thou assured
I hold it still more dear. A throne in Argos
Adrastes offered me ; if I had loved
A sceptre, for itself, I there had reigned.

Joc. Thou rather, than t' obtain a throne, oh son,
Be anxious to deserve one. I still hope
That thou wilt have one : yet if both of us
Eteocles deceive, I pray thee, tell me,
Whose is the infamy, and whose the glory ?
Yield to my reasons, to my prayers, and tears ;
Yield to the tears of thy unhappy country.
Wouldst thou destroy Thebes ere thou reign'st in
Thebes ?

Pol. I have already said it, war I wish not :
But force assists t' obtain more certain peace.

Joc. Lov'st thou thy mother ?

Pol. Far more than myself !

Joc. My life is in thy hands.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Creon, Jocasta, Polinices.

Joc. Ah, Creon comes !
Complete my conquest over Polinices . . .
I haste to use my influence with his brother.
Which of you two will yield ? Thou wilt, my son,
If thou rememberest that on thee alone
Thy mother's life, the fate of Thebes, depends.

SCENE THE SIXTH.

Polinices, Creon.

Cre. Ah, wretched mother ! how I pity her !
Little she knows her sons. Yet she might be
Happy, perchance, if it on thee depended.
Dost thou then yield ? Trustest thou to thy brother ?

Pol. I have on nothing yet resolved : 'tis true,
It wounds my soul to hear myself proclaim'd
An enemy in Thebes ; it wounds my soul
To be the author of fraternal strife ;
What ought I now to do ?

Cre. To reign.

Pol. The throne
Can I have here without the loss of blood ?
Cre. E'en from the cradle as a son I loved thee :
I always saw in thee the better nature ;
When 'twixt you both your mother hesitated,
How often have I made her notice it !
Oh, Polinices ! I have not the heart
Now to deceive thee. No, thou wilt not reign
Here without spilling blood.

Pol. Oh, Heaven!

Cre. But thou

May'st chuse : it doth depend on thee alone,
Little to shed, or much.

Pol. What do I hear?

This, from the first, was what I chiefly feared.

I only, then, have choice of error left.

No, it shall never be, no never : I

Will never violate, by shedding blood,

So many, and such sanctimonious ties,

Come, what come may : by means iniquitous

I will not prosecute a righteous cause.

Adrastes shall return again to Argos ;

Alone, and powerless, I will stay in Thebes.

Cre. Thou art most virtuous, as I always thought
thee.

Much I commend thy words ; but can I let thee
Chuse what will ruin both thyself and us ?

Pol. Is then that ruin certain ?

Cre. Dost thou know

Thy brother ?

Pol. Yes, I know him : he hates me

Much as he loves the throne, and more : but yet,

I think, or are they flatteries of my fancy,

That, in despite of him, with generous treatment,

I might constrain him to a generous conduct.

Shame can work wonders ; we shall have to-day,

My mother, Thebes, the Argive king, the world,

As witnesses between us.

Cre. Had he not

The gods before as witnesses ? what say'st thou ?

His mother, and the gods, the Argive king,

Thebes, and the world, he impiously scorns.

I am constrain'd to speak without disguise.
In Thebes, with iron hand, a perjured king
The sceptre grasps ; by all his subjects hated :
If terror had not watched in his defence,
He long ago had lost his throne and life.
Thou art the last hope of the Theban people.
That day in which thy milder character
Ascends once more the hereditary throne,
The oppressed multitude will deem the day
Of its deliverance . . . Where is now our hope ?
That day will ne'er arrive.

Pol. Will ne'er arrive ?

This, this, shall be the day.

Cre. Perhaps 'twill be this . . .

Ah, day eventful ! Prince unfortunate !
Another now usurps that throne from thee . . .
Nor while his life remains wilt thou regain it.
Ah, trust me, that he even now ascribes
Thy wish for it to guilt !

Pol. What a new flame
Of rage thou kindlest in me, when, at last,
After long struggles with myself, I seemed
Surmounting past revenge !

Cre. Erewhile the king
Swore, and I heard him, that he would not live
Except upon the throne.

Pol. To perjury
He is accustomed, and, on this occasion,
He shall be perjured ; I dare promise thee.
Wretch, thou shalt live, but not upon the throne !

Cre. Thy hope for this is vain. There is no way
The throne to reascend, if thou resolve not
To trample on the body of thy brother.

Pol. Cease; thou distractest me! Shall I embrue
My hands with blood fraternal? 'The dire thought
Appals me . . . Impious and fatal crown,
Art thou of so much worth, that thou deservest
With turpitude like this to be procured?

Cre. If he would take away thy crown alone,
That were excusable; but to such height
In him unnatural hate and rage have risen,
That, life for life, thou art constrain'd by force
To give it, or to take it . . .

Pol. I wish not
To spill his blood.

Cre. Wilt thou then give him thine?

Pol. Though here I stay alone, Heaven and my
sword,

My courage, stay with me; nor will it be
To him an easy task to take my life.

Cre. Valour—how can that cope with subtle fraud?
Here dost thou look for open opposition?

Pol. Then treachery is prepared for me! Oh,
speak;
Reveal it to me . . .

Cre. Heavens! what shall I do?
Yet, if I speak, and thou preventest not
The consequence, I fall the tyrant's victim,
And thou—thou art not safe.

Pol. The apprehension
Of treachery suffices not to make me
An impious traitor. Speak; there may be means
By which I may be saved; or, if I fall,
That I may fall alone.

Cre. Thou hast not yet
The art of perjury learned. Dar'st thou to me

Thy sacred faith to pledge a horrid secret
To keep, that I prepare to tell thee now?

Pol. Yes ; by my mother's life I swear to keep it.
Thou know'st that life is sacred to me : speak.

Cre. But we are in the palace . . . an abode
Too perilous for us . . . perhaps here already
Too much at length to thee I've spoken . . . Hence
To some securer spot.

Pol. Is there in Thebes

A place exempted from the tyrant's influence ?

Cre. 'Tis meet that, with profoundest caution, we
Elude his subtle wariness. From hence
A secret path, and long disused, descends
Towards the temple . . . Let us seek this path ;
There I will tell thee all.

Pol. I follow thee.

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Eteocles, Creon.

Ete. Hast thou seen Polinices ? Dost thou think
That he hates me as much as I hate him ?

Ah, no ! in this, as well as other things,
I do surpass him quite.

Cre. With hating thee
He is not satisfied ; he feels for thee
The bitterest contempt. He hath already
Swerved from his purpose. Loudly he asserts,
That he will have, as witnesses in Thebes
Of this fraternal peace, his friends from Argos ;
In my opinion 'tis to insult thee more.

Nor shall we see them from our gates depart,
Till thou, a wandering exile, leav'st this city.
Thou seest that now, for one, there doth remain
But a brief moment to forestall the other ;
He who is most supine shall fall the victim.
'Tis now most evident, that he, by force,
Challenges thy refusal. O'er thy head
The fatal sword is now suspended ; thou,
Wilt thou not give the signal to unsheathe it ?
To thee 'twas hitherto alone expedient,
But to thy safety indispensable
His death is now become.

Ete. May I, at last,
To my revenge, for which so long I've sighed,
And to my hate and rage, succeed to give
A consummation speedy and secure.
When he is dead, a valour in the camp
Will I display proportioned to the cause.
Adrastes, prosecute the siege of Thebes,
And thou shalt quickly see, that in the fight
I can atone for treason in the palace.

Cre. The Argives, trusting to the truce, secure
Within the camp repose ; 'twould be most easy
To make a dreadful carnage, if on them
Thou shouldst fall unawares. With their alarm
A dreadful doubt would mingle ; they would know
Nothing of Polinices.

Ete. Sayst thou nothing ?
They should know all, and of another kind
Should be their apprehension. To the Argives
The traitor's head shall be display'd on high ;
Lugubrious symbol to our foes alone
Of portent ominous ; but, to ourselves,

The presage, and the pledge, of victory's palm.

Cre. Then do not be importunate with him
To send the hostile troops again to Argos.
Thou wouldst augment, and vainly, his suspicions :
And should he yield, which is not probable,
It would be detrimental to thy cause.

Adrastes would have scarcely left his post,
Than, afterwards, in hearing of the death
Given to his son-in-law in Thebes, more fierce
He, his avenger, would return ; to blood,
To fire, and the exterminating sword,
Devoting all the ill-defended realm.
King, thou hast chosen well ! With one hand give
Correction to the traitor, with the other,
At one fierce onset, unexpectedly
Bring on thy foes, war, fear, confusion, ruin.

Ete. A ruin most complete, since least expected.
Do thou prepare for war while I feign peace.
But see, my mother comes : let us retire ;
If ever there was need to shun her presence
This is the moment . . .

Cre. Let us both avoid her.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Jocasta, Antigone.

Joc. Ah, see ! He shuns my sight ; still hesitates
To trust his mother !

Ant. An usurper fears
Whoe'er he meets.

Joc. Since he beheld his brother,
He has most carefully our presence shunn'd :

To what must I impute it ?

Ant. Canst thou doubt ?

In his dissembling breast he cherishes
Hatred and rancour, blood and fell revenge.

Joc. Thou put'st on all his deeds a foul construction.

Were not the terms that he demanded fair ?
And if to-day the invading brother yields,
As almost he has pledged himself to do it,
To my entreaties, and the voice of reason,
I do not see with what pretence the king
Can palliate his violated faith.

Ant. To him pretences never will be wanting
For violated faith. 'Tis vain to hope
For peace, if Polinices does not yield
The throne for ever to Eteocles.
It cannot be concealed, the throne alone
Can somewhat mitigate the atrocious cast
Of his ambitious nature. He esteems
That throne the dearest portion of himself,
A second life.

Joc. And yet his accents prove,
That more he values than the throne, that honour
That gives the throne its lustre : to be brief,
'Twas Polinices that did menace first.

Ant. He was the first offended. Did a heart,
That was invincible, e'er gain the power,
The sense to smother of unworthy insults ?
Full of revenge, but of a noble kind,
Proudly does Polinices from his lips
Pour forth his indignation ; mute his brother ;
Mute—yet around him, I, at all times, see
A train immense of counsellors, from whom,

- 'Tis certain, that he never will imbibe
 Impressions high, or generous. Here, alas!
 There are enough of those degraded wretches
 Who love themselves alone; to whom the name
 — Of country is unknown; who, at the thought,
 Shudder, and freeze with terror, that a king
 — May mount the throne who loves the cause of virtue.
 Nor fear they without reason; they would drag
 Their days in heaviness beneath the sway
 Of such a monarch. I affirm it, mother,
 And do thou heed th' assertion, to this peace
 So much desired, the evanescent rage
 Of Polinices, of Eteocles
 The more inveterate and deeper hate,
 Are not invincible impediments:
 No; the invincible impediment
 Rather arises from the insidious wiles
 — Of scycophants, whose element is falsehood. —

SCENE THE THIRD.

Jocasta, Antigone, Polinices.

Joc. My son, I hope in thee, in thee alone!
 Thy mother, Thebes, thy sister, whom thou lovest,
 And who so much loves thee, with real peace
 Wilt thou make all these happy? Is it true?
 Speak, I entreat thee. Art thou not of sons,
 Of brothers, and of citizens, the best?
 Say, has Adrastes on return resolved?

Pol. Does, then, Eteocles from Thebes depart?

Joc. What do I hear? to our confusion then,
 And to thy shame, must I for ever hear thee
 Deny us peace? or not the first consent to it?

Alas ! thy brother will too surely go !
 Too surely, as thou wentest, go to exile :
 By Heaven I am condemned, and by my sons,
 To everlasting tears ! they ne'er will cease !
 Feed'st thou, my son, on my maternal tears ?
 Ah say, were not thy words erewhile all peace ?

Pol. Alas ! they're farther now from peace than
 ever !

Thou must not ask of me the cause : but yet
 There does exist for this a cause so horrid
 That I can never tell it thee. Thou wilt,
 Ere long, discover it thyself ; a chill,
 A mortal chill, through all thy bones will rush
 When thou dost hear it. More I cannot say,
 Than that Adrastes does not leave these walls ;
 No, he departs not. Soon, in spite of me,
 The lofty walls of perjured Thebes laid low,
 May yield him entrance mid their broken fragments :
 But let the evil come to him who courts it.
 Perhaps, in the sanguinary contest, I
 May also find a tomb ; nor shall it grieve me,
 Provided that I fall not unavenged.

Joc. Alas ! on whom dost thou thus thirst for
 vengeance ?

Pol. Upon a traitor.

Joc. He the traitor is,
 Who, thus, flagitiously, with fabled plots,
 Cherish'd in thee this impious doubt and rage :
 Believe me only . . .

Ant. Mother, brother, hear ! . . .
 Trust only my alarm.

Joc. Say'st thou alarm ?
 Speak ; what alarm hast thou ?

Ant. Eteocles

Has Creon for his counsellor ; and thence
A reasonable terror . . .

Joc. Creon ?

Pol. Creon ?

Ah, were it only he that counsels him ! . . .

I am too well versed to be duped by this . . .

Creon . . . had it not been for him . . . ah, perhaps
To impious revenge . . .

Joc. What do I hear ?

What broken sentences ! what bursts of anger !

What secret weighs upon thy bosom ? Speak . . .

Pol. I cannot speak. As I can now be speechless,
Oh that I could forget, or ne'er have known,
The abominable secret ! 'Twould have been
More fortunate for all ; a single crime
Had then sufficed ; 'twere better to have died
Betrayed, than thus revenged. And yet to know it,
And to be passive, is impossible.

Oh, what a deluge I behold of blood !

What slaughter ! Of his friendship what a proof !

What fatal proof to me has Creon given !

Ant. Yes, brother ! now indeed I pity thee.

What didst thou say ? The harbinger of death

Is the dire friendship of the impious Creon !

Joc. 'Tis true, till now, of Polinices' claims

He never seemed the advocate. But what

Must I infer from this ? Daughter, dar'st thou ? . . .

Pol. E'en more than others are, of my just cause,
And of myself, is Creon advocate.

Ant. Creon betrays you all ; I swear he does :

Of all of ye he makes a sport, and he

But tampers with you to complete your ruin.

Joc. Where learn'd'st thou such harsh judgments?
whence so bold?

Creon's my brother! these his nephews! would
he . . .

Ant. Too long have I been silent; and e'en now
I do not speak at random. Of that Creon,
Who is thy brother, Emon is the son. —
He knows his father; he himself inform'd me;
Why should I waste more words? I swear again
He hates you both: to the contested throne
Creon aspires; and what atrocity
Is there, that clears a passage to the throne,
That is not learned in Thebes?

Joc. I scarce believe it . . .
And yet who knows? This, this alone was wanting
To all our other horrors!

Pol. Where have I
Entered incautiously? What labyrinth
Of unexampled perfidy! My foes,
My most atrocious foes, I here am doomed
Among my kindred to enumerate!
But you, to whom I listen, you, that now
I see in friendly semblance round me stand,
How can I know if in your breasts there dwell
Or faith or treachery? How can I know
If you are not in thought my enemies?
Thou art my mother, and my sister thou;
What avails this? Such names, 'tis true, are sacred;
But in this Thebes such names are too portentous.
Do not I call th' usurper brother? call
Creon my uncle? Inauspicious palace,
Where to the hated light my eyes I opened!
The vile confederates thy walls contain

Are all, all of my blood ! and I, perchance,
The laughing stock of all ! Exiled so long,
I find myself a stranger in my palace :
Where'er I turn my apprehensive look
I see a traitor. All life's charities
Are banished hence ! What do I seek in Thebes ?
What do I hope ? or why remain I here ?
What death is there more horrible than life
Dragg'd on with you in comfortless suspicion ?
Yes, yes, I feel it, at my birth, ye furies,
Ye only did preside ; over my life
Ye, ye, preside alone : to what distress,
To what foul stain, do you reserve my life ? . . .
Perhaps from Avernus ye alone repel me,
Ye dire Eumenides, since I am yet
Not quite so impious as Œdipus !

Joc. Oh, thou, of Œdipus the worthy son,
Dost thou accuse of treachery thy mother ?
Dar'st thou invoke the furies of thy birth ?

Pol. What other gods should be invoked in Thebes

Joc. Son . . .

Ant. Brother . . .

Pol. Argos is my fittest home.
Faith still is kept in Argos : there I live
Secure from foes, and never hear the names
Of brother and of son.

Joc. Return to Argos ;
Fly ; return quickly ; or in Thebes confide
Alone in those who flatter to betray thee.

Pol. With equal safety I confide in Thebes
On those who love, and those who hate my person
Oh, cruel doubt, whence I in terror live,
And scarcely trust myself ! I have no throne,

Yet all a monarch's perturbations feel;
Guilty suspicion; and degrading terror;
And all the insane impotence of rage!
Oh, horrid movements, of my heart unworthy,
Which I, till now, ne'er knew! why do I feel
Your sway omnipotent, and omnipresent?
In Thebes there is a more consummate tyrant:
For you his bosom is a fitter dwelling;
Tear him to pieces: let him not taste peace
Amid his many crimes; that peace, of which
I'm so unjustly robbed.

Ant. Ah, calm thyself;
Listen to me: thy wretched mother's heart
Thou piercest with thy words. We both love thee,
As son and brother ne'er were loved before.

Joc. Compose thyself; thy most unjust suspicions
Fain would I not remember. Thou shouldst hide
Nothing from me; speak, my beloved son!
Ah, be constrained by pity for thy mother!
The horrible secret, pent up in thy breast,
Tell it, and perhaps . . .

Pol. Oh, mother! . . . I have sworn
To keep it, and my faith's inviolate;
Before I forfeit that, ah, let me perish!
It may appear in Thebes excess of virtue,
Such it seems not to me; my own applause
Is dear to me, and not the applause of Thebes.

Joc. Keep then thy oath, since it involves my
death!
Fulfil thy vows! Give me a thousand deaths,
And leave in doubt the palpitating heart
Of a most wretched mother! She knows not
Which son in danger, which in safety, lives;

Keep'st thou from her the means of saving both ?

Ant. More than thy oath, inviolably sacred,
And far more ancient, are the ties of nature.

Pol. Who first infringed them ?

Joc. If, by breach of oath,
Thou canst save blood, and frustrate treacherous
deeds,

The heavens absolve the compact.

Pol. Why should I

Seek to protect the life-blood of a traitor ?

Let it be shed, but in the field. Deceit

Let the deceiver use, it well becomes him.

But a short time remains to weave new frauds.

Ant. Oh, brother, thou didst love me once ; but
That love no longer second my entreaties,
I do conjure thee by thy wife, beloved
Far more than we are ; by thy little child,
Whom thou with tears didst name ; ah, cast from
thee,

I do conjure thee, every thought of vengeance !

Say, wouldst thou thy hereditary throne

With foulest crimes and blood contaminate ?

Blood, which is not thy own, thou canst not shed
In Thebes.

Joc. Accumulated vengeance falls

Upon thy head in Thebes ; thy footsteps turn

From the dread precipice which yawns before thee

Thou yet hast time to do it : if thou be

(Which I believe not) by Eteocles

Ensnared, each plot which thou to me revealest,

Thou, by that deed, dost frustrate ; dost forestall

All the necessity for fell revenge.

Beloved son, whate'er the crime may be,

It cannot, by a brother's death, be cancell'd.

Pol. Why didst thou make me brother to this traitor ?

Joc. And why wilt thou in wickedness surpass him ?

Pol. Thou tearest my heart asunder . . . wouldst thou hear ?

Perhaps 'tis a lie . . . perhaps a double treachery . . .

Perhaps . . . what can one here believe ? . . . farewell.

Joc. Stay, stay !

Ant. See, Creon comes.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Creon, Jocasta, Antigone, Polinices.

Joc. Deliver me

From a tremendous, horrible suspicion . . .

Ah, say . . . Can it be so ?

Cre. Transport and peace,

A lasting peace I bring you. Dry your tears ;

Oh ladies, Polinices is our king.

I hasten first to yield a subject's homage.

Pol. Ah, may the omen be propitious to me :

Who, more than thou, wishes to see me reign ?

Joc. Dost thou speak truth ?

Cre. Banish suspicion hence ;

I from the court have all suspicion driven.

Eteocles is changed.

Pol. Eteocles

Is changed ! . . . and is it Creon tells me so ?

Cre. The plot is hushed at present.¹ It is true,

¹ In a whisper to Polinices.

That my persuasions were inadequate
To make him yield, had there not been to these
More cogent reasons joined. Each warrior
Murmurs in Thebes; and, for a perjured king,
Reluctantly equips himself for battle.
The universal backwardness compels him;
This he allows not; but who does not see it?
He's conquered by necessity, yet chuses,
By lofty phrase, to hide it from the world.

Joc. I have heard thee speak of him in different terms.

Cre. Thou heard'st me to the king, in flattering speech,

Strive to adorn the truth; this I deny not:
But does he ever, with sincerity,
Permit me to address him? Oh, severe
And despicable servitude! And yet,
Had I not flattered him, more banefully
Others had done the business. Yet, behold,
To win him to his duty, not a little
Does it conspire, that I had heretofore
Made his heart captive. In a little time
He will convene you here; it is his will
That all the people, and the mitred priests,
The altars of the gods, the deed should witness.
Hence, he himself, in ceremonial pomp,
Will lead thee to the throne...

Joc. Am I permitted
Hopes to indulge like these? It cannot be!
Fallacious hope a thousand times hath flattered,
A thousand times deceived me.

Cre. What, I pray,
Dost thou now fear? to consummate the deed

The rite alone is wanting. I confess,
That, if I trusted to his virtue only,
I might have apprehensions ; but I place
In his well-grounded fears my confidence.
Of th' alienated Thebans, he has not
Either the hearts or hands : he will, however,
Affect the merit to bestow on thee
That sceptre, which the murmurs of the people
Snatch from his grasp ; in that alone indulge him.

Pol. I will.

Ant. Ah, pause awhile. Within my breast
I feel a horrid presage . . .

Pol. Instantly
Hither we will return.

Joc. I also tremble.

Ant. Ah, wretched me !

Pol. I do not, cannot tremble.
My right is just : The gods are on my side.
If they withdraw themselves, I have my sword.

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

*Eteocles, Jocasta, Polinices, Antigone, Priests,
People, Soldiers.*

Joc. Ye gods ! if this be the propitious day
Of wished-for peace, ah, let it be my last.
'Twould be too great presumption to expect
Others like this hereafter to arise ;
This is the summit of my warmest hopes . . .
But where is Creon ?

Ete. He will soon be here.

If now thou fear, thou wilt offend me, mother ;
No less than thine is my desire for peace ;
Since thus I purchase it, and to obtain it
Surrender thus my kingdom. Unconstrain'd
I yield ; forcibly not taken from me,
Albeit the injurious rumour will be spread
That I could not defend it. But the truth
Shall be made manifest. I would not keep it ;
Nor thee, oh mother, would I longer keep
'Twixt hope and fear suspended. To my deed,
My only motives are the general good,
The safety of my people. Yet I prize,
Remember yet the name of citizen :
And shall display it ; to the shame, perchance,
Of such as trample with unholy feet
Their country's sacred rites. I never, no,
Never more worthy I esteem'd myself,
Nor was, more worthy than I am to-day
To fill my throne ; yea, on the very moment,
On which, self-moved, I from that throne descend.

Pol. Lofty professions, from a lofty heart !
Magnanimous as thy professions are
I shall esteem thy nature ; perhaps it is so.
Time, and our deeds, at length will manifest
Whether, in all things, our resemblance holds.
I can assure thee, that the sceptre never
Was, in my sight, less precious than to-day ;
To-day that I am destined to regain it.
I have not been the first to tender peace,
Though, perhaps, e'en more than others in my heart.
Yea, in my very sword, I carry it.
If I have not sent back the troops to Argos
Thou know'st the reason . . .

Ete. What is it thou sayest ?
Whence should I know it ? Can I read thy heart ?
Soon wilt thou reign ; then shall we see how far
Thou mak'st thy claim good to the name of hero.
For the prosperity of Thebes, I wish
That thou wert greater than thou seem'st, or art.
Never could gnawing envy discompose
My soul's tranquillity ; thy government,
If it please Thebes, will be by me commended ;
Although I now am destined to depart
An exile from my country, evermore,
Both in its adverse, or in its prosperous, state,
I shall alike partake ; and of my fate,
Whate'er the colour of that fate may be,
My soul shall be the master, not the slave :
And in whatever land th' immortal gods
May fix my destiny, those gods shall hear
My fervent vows for thy successful sway.

Pol. I also have endured a bitter exile,
Sever'd from all that is on earth accounted
Or dear or precious. Were it not that thou
Wouldst deem the sight of me upon thy throne
Far harder to endure than any exile,
Painful as it might be, I would assure thee,
Within this palace, in our native Thebes,
Inviolable safety : but, alas !
To hear thyself proclaim'd a subject here,
Here, where thou hast so long the sceptre sway'd,
Would be too exquisite a sufferance
For thy exalted heart . . .

Ete. The alternate law,
I fear, would scarcely be observed betwixt us.
My presence, perhaps, in spite of my desire,

Might here occasion tumults. If in Thebes
I had no one to fear except my brother,
I might securely there in privacy
Pass on my days ; but in a monarch's heart
Suspicion is instinctive : and no king
(However virtuous) has enough of virtue
To banish from his heart the cleaving torment.
Close by his royal side, upon the throne,
Suspicion sits with flattery. For thy peace,
And for my own peace, must I not stay here.
I go : the example thou hast given me :
I hope, alone, in my departure hence
To imitate thy conduct : but once more,
Far differently to what thyself hast done,
In Thebes to reappear.

Pol. Thou, in thy heart,
Dost cherish a just hope ; a hope that shews,
Spite of thyself, thou deem'st me not forsworn,
That thou art well assured, that I need not
The sword to make me recollect my oath.

Joc. My sons, what accents do I hear ? Oh heavens,
Do not I see at every word and gesture
Your ill-concealed and unextinguished hate,
In each of you break forth ? And is this not
The day, the hour, appointed by you both
To terminate your misadventurous contest ?
And is not this the place where you proposed,
With more coercive rites, and firmer faith,
To renovate your violated oaths ?
How ill do taunting accents of defiance,
How inauspiciously they usher in
A compact so tremendous ! On the lips
Of each sit words of peace, while on each heart

Sits war enthroned. Faith is by each invoked ;
 Insult each reprobates, yet both indulge it ;
 And each denies to give the faith he asks.
 Perhaps ere ye plight your oaths ye both are per-
 jured :

What boots delay, if this be not the case ?

Ete. Wise council ; why should we a moment
 longer

Delay the sacred rite ? 'Tis most unwise
 To tamper thus with wounds heal'd partially.
 I will not sully, with contending more,
 That glory which is mine exclusively ;
 The glory of bestowing peace on one
 That threatens me with overwhelming war.
 Bring there, ah bring to us, the sacred cup,
 And be the initiatory rite accomplished,
 The rite of our forefathers. May the oath,
 Yes, mother, may to-day the alternate oath
 Make thee, my sister, my afflicted country,
 Yea, all of you, secure ! Behold the cup !
 My brother, contemplate it reverently !
 To thee I first present it. On its brim,
 Fill'd with a sacred terror, fix thy lips.
 The observer, not betrayer, of the laws,
 Swear to ascend the throne ; and further swear,
 That to thy brother, when the year's accomplished,
 Thou wilt restore the sceptre of thy fathers.

Pol. Why should I swear to yield what yet I grasp
 not ?

First thou shouldst swear thou wilt transfer it to me,
 I to restore it next . . .

Ete. Now art not thou
 He, that to Thebes brings tumult and disgrace ;

Slaughter and flames? Who but thyself alone
 Can reassure the apprehensive people,
 Weeping for thee, and kept by thee in torment?
 Matrons disconsolate depend on thee;
 Old age depends on thee; and trembling wives,
 And innocent babes (behold) towards thee stretch
 Their suppliant hands. Why dost thou now delay?
 'Tis evident that all expect from thee,
 Expect from thee alone, the promised peace.

Pol. This cup, which now thou bringest, is the
 pledge

Of amity fraternal . . . of thy faith?

Ete. The pledge it is of sacred amity.

Pol. Dar'st thou assert it?

Ete. Canst thou doubt my word?

Pol. Behold, then, from my brother I receive
 A pledge . . . an infamous, unnatural pledge, . . .
 Unnatural pledge of most unnatural hate,
 A pledge of everlasting hate betwixt us,
 Which in the blood of both of us alone
 Can be extinguished. Thebans, Antigone,
 Jocasta, witness how he keeps his faith.
 Eteocles,—This cup has poison in it.

Ete. Oh, vile suspicion! Liar!

Joc. Do I hear it?

Dar'st thou of such foul stain impeach thy brother?

Pol. Yes, I dare do it. By thyself I swear,
 Oh mother, there is poison in the cup!

And, mother, I swear not by thee in vain.

The stain is dire and foul . . . most foul . . . yet true

Eteocles, dar'st thou give me the lie?

First taste the cup: behold it: I consent
 To taste it afterwards, and with thee die.

Ete. Because thou'rt worthy of a traitor's death,
Dar'st thou, before all Thebes, to stigmatize
Me with the crime of treason? What! Shall I
Degrade myself to an unworthy test,
To cure thee of suspicion? Thou dost feign
An apprehension thou dost not believe,
And awkwardly dost feign it . . . fratricide! . . .
Infamous fratricide shall I contrive it?
And if I wish the death that is thy due
To give to thee, art thou not in my power?
Why stoop to fraud while force is in my hands?
Am I not yet a monarch in this Thebes?
My subject thou, who could deliver thee
From the tremendous anger of thy lord?

Pol. 'Tis easy the deliverance from thy anger!
But, ah! not easy from thy subtle frauds.
Thy subject, I could make thee tremble; thee—
Thee, and thy minions, in thy very palace!
But, conscious of thy guilt, thou hast no courage
To challenge me to war.

Ete. Even as thou
Resumest all thy fury, I resume
All mine; and every one is witness here
That thou dost goad me to it . . . Lay aside
All pretexts; cast aside, without delay,
The desecrated cup. Eternal war,
Eternal hatred, thou hast sworn to me;
Eternal war and hate to thee I swear.

Joc. A little while delay. Give me that cup,
Give it to me: Although it death contain,
I fearlessly will press it to my lips.
Happy, if on this day the gods fulfil

My long desire for death. Thus, from the sight,
The impious sight of my atrocious sons,
I shall eternally obtain deliverance.
One of you is a traitor! which I know not.
The gods alone know this. Supernal powers,
To you alone, on this ill-omen'd day,
My vows are all directed: in that cup
The truth lies hidden; it shall be reveal'd;
Give it to me; the doubt shall be dispell'd.

Pol. No; that shall never be...

Ant. What mad attempt,

Oh mother! Polinices, grasp the cup.
Securely grasp it, brother! 'Tis thy gift,
Eteocles! What art thou doing? First
Let Creon be brought hither; every crime
To him is known, ... he is the prime instrument...

Joc. Unhand me, daughter; leave me; hold thy
peace.

Ah, where can Creon be? I have no wish
To hear more tidings: death alone I wish; ...
And in the troubled look of one of you ...
And in the fatal silence, I perceive
That death. Be satisfied. I haste to drink it.

Ant. Refrain...

Pol. Oh, mother, from my hands the cup
Thou vainly hop'st to gain...

Ete. Give me that cup,
Give it to me: to earth I cast it thus:
And break, at the same time, all peace betwixt us.
I, in the field of battle, with my sword
Th' infamous accusation will refute.

Pol. One, skill'd to poison, ill will wield a sword.

Ete. Too ardently I thirst to drink thy blood.

Pol. Perchance my sword may drink thy blood
the first.

Ete. Perhaps, in the field, in our abhorred blood,
We both at once may emulously bathe.
Thou shalt there surely taste another cup ;
There we will drink each other's blood, and swear,
As we gulp down the execrable poison,
E'en after death, interminable hate.

Pol. I swear at once to punish and despise thee.
Ah ! thou wert never worthy of my hatred ;
Nor art thou now. The abominable throne,
By thee contaminate, with thee shall fall.
Ah, could I thus destroy all memory
Of our accursed and reprobated race !

Ete. Now, truly, thou art brother of my blood !

Joc. True sons ye are of *Œdipus* and me.
I see again the furies rise in you
Which erst presided o'er my nuptial bed.
Now, now, ye hasten, with a horrid joy,
To expiate my fault ; and fratricide
Shall make atonement for incestuous guilt.
Why do ye linger, valiant as ye are ?
Why do ye interrupt your hellish rage ?

Ete. By a necessity we are constrain'd
To consummate the stern decrees of fate :
Of crime we are the offspring ; in our veins
Turpitude creeps connatural with our blood.

[*To Polinices.*

While thou hast time withdraw from me and ven-
geance,

Quickly : . . . before my sword . . .

Pol. What is thy sword ?

Ete. Fly, seek asylum in the Argive camp;
E'en there I shall not fail to bring thee death.

SCENE THE SECOND.

*Creon, Eteocles, Jocasta, Polinices, Antigone, Priests,
People, Soldiers.*

Cre. We are betrayed ; and broken is the truce ;
Adrastes on all sides the wall assaults,
And with the ground threatens to level Thebes,
If Polinices instantly appear not,
Restored to liberty, without the gates.

Ete. Adrastes ! 'Tis not he that has betrayed us !
I know the traitor well : I now could take
On him and on Adrastes at a blow,
On Polinices also, a fierce vengeance ;
What could prevent me, but that intense hatred
Which, with one blow, would ill be satisfied !
From Thebes securely, Polinices, go :
Consider as a pledge of faith, the wish,
The ardent wish, that, ever since my birth,
I've cherish'd in my breast of meeting thee
In the fierce trial of our rival swords.
Thou, Creon, in the camp expect to die :
By theban battle-axe, or argive sword,
I leave it to thy choice.

Joc. Oh, son ! . . .

Ete. In vain
Thou wouldst oppose.

Joc. Ah, listen to me, son ! . . .

Ete. Guards, let my mother stir not from the palace.
No obstacle remains : I now expect
To meet thee on the plain.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Jocasta, Polinices, Antigone.

Pol. I hasten thither.
Tremble.

Joc. He is thy brother. Listen to me . . .

Pol. He is my enemy; he has betray'd me . .
My honour . . .

Joc. Honour's voice bids thee abstain
From all misdeeds. Oh, son ! I pray thee pause . . .
What art thou rushing to perform ? . . . Oh heavens !

Pol. And while for me Adrastes danger braves,
Should I stay here subdued by women's tears ?
In vain the hope . . .

Joc. The sword . . . thrust by thy hand . . .
Into thy brother's breast . . .

Pol. I am constrain'd
On yonder plain to shew myself; I there
Would gain an honour'd death. Him, whom thou
call'st

My brother, there I will not seek, and hope
Not to encounter him. So much to thee
I promise. Now farewell.

Joc. Death steals on me.

Ant. Have pity on thyself, on us have pity . . .

Pol. Deaf to all pity I am forced to be :
I fly . . .

Joc. Ah, where ? oh stop . . .

Pol. To death.

Joc. He leaves me.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Jocasta, Antigone.

Joc. Alas! these eyes shall never see them more!...
Thou only now art left, my pitying child...
Ah, come with me, Antigone, and close
The dying eyes of a heart-broken mother.

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Jocasta.

Joc. Antigone returns not. Hard constraint
That here confines me! Trembling, and alone,
Am I here destined from afar to hear
The clamorous dissonance of th' unnatural strife?
The consummation am I destined here
To wait, of the abhorr'd fraternal vengeance?
Wretch that I am! Do I live yet? Yet hope?
What can I hope? I have no hope on earth:
My life is the miraculous effect
Of destiny, which wills that I should be
Involved in fratricide, then cease to breathe.
There doth remain no other trespass now,
Except this crime, to perpetrate in Thebes;
Shall not Jocasta be to this a witness?
Oh ye, of Thebes the sovereign arbiters,
Tremendous deities of realms below,
Why do ye now delay to burst asunder
"The dark, unbottom'd, infinite abyss,"
And instantly engulph us? I, perchance,

Am I not she who to my son have given
Both sons and brothers? Are not those fierce youths,
That now in battle drink each other's blood,
The fruit of horrid incest? We are yours,
Entirely yours, infernal deities! . . . —
Oh, pangs unuttered, and unutterable!
All the affections of a mother move me,
And yet to be a mother I abhor.
But what has happened? Suddenly the din,
The hollow din, of distant battle ceases . . .
To the tremendous dissonance succeeds
A silence as tremendous . . . fatal silence! . . .
To me the presage of more fatal tidings!
Who knows? . . . perchance the battle is suspended . . .
Ah me! . . . perchance the fatal strife is over . . .
What should I think, alas! what hope, what fear?
For whom breathe vows? For whom ask victory?
Alas! for neither: are not both my sons?
Oh thou, whoe'er thou beest, who palms hast won,
Into my presence come not; tremble, fly;
Delinquent—fly; entirely I devote
My undivided pity to the conquered:
Confederate shades, we will descend together
To Pluto's realms, and ask for vengeance there:
Nor can I ever bear to see a son
That, o'er a brother gasping on the earth,
Has raised the standard of flagitious conquest.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Antigone, Jocasta.

Joc. Antigone . . . thou speakest not . . . thy face
Is pale with hues of death. Oh, I have heard it,
That silence, that excruciating silence!

Ant. To a dire strife it yielded.

Joc. Are they dead . . .

My sons ? . . .

Ant. One only . . .

Joc. Which then lives ? Ah, traitor,
I will myself . . .

Ant. The combat I espied
From yon high tower : he fell upon the earth
Immersed in blood.

Joc. Which ? . . . speak . . .

Ant. Eteocles.

Joc. Thus Polinices hath fulfilled his promise,
Thus died : . . . thus shunn'd the execrable fight ?
Ah, miscreant ! Thy abominable rage
Thou then designedst to indulge, and cheat
Thy mother. Tremble, for I yet am living ;
And from thy breast that impious heart I gave thee
Will tear with my own hands.

Ant. Thou know'st not all :
Thy blame of Polinices is misplaced.

Joc. I blame the living : he alone is guilty.

Ant. Who knows if yet he lives ! ah, wretched mother,

If thou hast strength to listen, thou wilt learn,
That he was more unfortunate than guilty.

Scarce had he gain'd the plain, when round him
press'd

A valiant band of Argive warriors,
Who, emulously, to the sky sent up
A dreadful shout, announcing victory.
In a remote part of the plain the battle
Raged yet in doubtful conflict ; in the midst
Eteocles rose eminent : prepared,
In front, to cope with him Adrastes stood ;

And his heart, full of lofty hardihood,
Tydeus. Polinices, with swift feet,
Towards the mingled contest ran : alarm
Before him flew ; and death pursued his steps.
To right, to left, in front, in thousand shapes,
And frightful all, a thousand deaths he dealt ;
Nor was the death he sought to him allotted.
Where'er he turned his steps the Thebans wavered,
Yielded, and fled ; and hoped, by flight, to gain
Opprobrious safety. From the flying troops
Eteocles leaps forth in furious guise,
And with a terrible accent he exclaims,
“ To Polinices ! ” With precipitous rage
His steps he traces, and at last he finds him . . .

Joc. Alas ! oh dreadful ! . . . Did the other fly ?

Ant. How could he fly from such ferocious pride ?
Eteocles in haughty scorn broke forth ;
Taxed him with cowardice ; defiance breathed ;
And by mere force dared him to single combat.
“ Thebans,” he cried with a tremendous voice,
“ Thebans and Argives, cease your guilty rage !
“ Ye have descended to the field of battle
“ In our contention, prodigal of life :
“ Ours is the strife, be ours the forfeiture.
“ Let us, ourselves, to a conclusion bring
“ This unjust waste of blood, e'en in your presence,
“ And on this field of death. And thou, whom I
“ Should no more call my brother, do thou spare
“ The blood of Thebes ; thy hate, thy rage, thy sword,
“ All—all—on me let fall—on me alone.”
To speak and leap with fury to the charge,
Were actions of one instant.

Joc. Infamous ! . . .

But how ? to such a combat was the field,
By those armed multitudes, surrendered tamely ?

Ant. An universal fear, at such a sight,
Palsied the troops. Commingled as they were,
Stupid, immoveable, both armies stood
Spectators of the contest. Drunk with blood
And fury, of his own life quite regardless,
Provided his antagonist he slew,
Eteocles upon his wretched brother
Falls with his sword, and all his strength collects.
For a long time, intent to ward his blows,
Stands Polinices ; generously he fears
More for his wretched brother than himself,
Refusing to attack him. But, at length,
Seeing his brother obstinately chace him,
And press upon him more and more, and force him,
He cries, " I call to witness Heaven and Thebes,
" Thou will'st it." While to Heaven his eyes he
raised,

And thus exclaim'd, his sword he onward thrust ;
The hovering furies guide the reckless blow
To pierce the bosom of Eteocles.

He falls. Upon his brother spouts his blood :
Who, seeing this, towards his own breast turned
The bloody, smoking sword . . . I saw no more . . .
My senses, almost, at the cruel deed
Forsook me ; thick mists swam before my eyes ;
I flew, with tottering steps, and came to thee . . .
Alas ! what will the consummation be
Of this most fatal incident ? . . .

Joc. 'Twill be,
Doubt not, one worthy of our family !
Ah, leave the care of that to the fell rage,

The fury, of the persecuting gods.
But who comes towards us? What do I behold?
Dying Eteocles is hither borne.

Ant. His warriors on each side support his steps!

Joc. Ah, with what death-like slowness he advances!

Ant. Yonder, see Polinices in his train! . . .

SCENE THE THIRD.

Eteocles, Polinices, Jocasta, Antigone, Soldiers of Eteocles.

Ant. [*To Polinices.*] Ah! thou at least art safe . . .

Pol. Touch me not, sister!

I am all cover'd with my brother's blood.

Joc. Ah wretch, ah infamous, ah fratricide!

Dar'st thou approach the presence of a mother
Whose son thou hast assassinated?

Pol. No.

'Twas my desire never more to be
Within thy presence living; I had turned,
With a more furious hand against myself,
The weapon fatal to my brother's life . . .

Joc. But yet thou art alive . . .

Ant. What life? oh, Heaven!

Pol. Inopportunately Emon grasp'd my hand,
And by main force disarmed it of its sword.
Perhaps cruel fate designs that I should be
By other hands transfix'd. If by thy hands,
Strike, mother, strike, behold my naked breast:
Why dost thou doubt? I am no more thy son,
I, who deprived thee of another son.

Joc. Be silent now; disturb not any longer
Our parting moments. Oh, Eteocles,

Dost thou not hear me? dost not recognise
Her who now clasps thee to her tortured heart?
It is thy mother; they are her warm tears,
Mixed with thy blood, which thou feel'st trickling
down

Thy face and thy pierced bosom. I beseech thee,
Once more thine eye-lids open.

Ete. Oh, my mother! . . .

Tell me . . . am I in Thebes?

Joc. Within thy palace.

Ete. Speak . . . do I die a king? That traitor? ah!
What do I see? Thou livest, and I . . . die . . .

Pol. Thou shalt have all my blood; I have already
Devoted all that blood to pacify

Thy haughty and inexorable shade.

Dispel thy anger; thou thyself, thou knowest,
Soughtest thy death; with swift temerity
Abandonedst thy bosom to my sword.

Alas! the fatal blow robs thee of life,

And, more than life, it robs me of my honour.

Grant me thy pardon ere the fault I punish,
Which baffles all attempt at reparation.

Now that that hatred I have merited,

The enmity of a vindictive brother,

I think there is no pang that equals it.

I swear I hate thee not; sight of thy blood,

Th' atrocious sight, has banished from my heart

All rancour . . . wretched that I am, I see

That thou'rt exasperated by my prayers.

Ete. Of what speak'st thou? Thou, son of *Œdipus*,
Dost pardon ask of me? Dost dare to hope,

From one that springs from *Œdipus*, forgiveness?

Joc. Oh son, oh son, do there in thy sick bosom

Such bitter passions dwell ?

Ete. Within our breasts

The impious furies have their throne erected :

I do not feel that mine are fled from me ;

Nor though their blood is lost, that my foul veins

Of their inbred and cleaving hate are cleansed.

Oh, impious agony ! . . . atrocious rage !

Livest thou yet ? and hast thou conquer'd me ?

And shalt thou fill my throne ? make haste, oh death,

That I may never see the maddening sight.

Pol. I ne'er will fill thy throne, again I swear it ;

Descend in peace to Pluto's dark abodes.

To join thy sceptred ancestors, engarlanded

With the imperial chaplet, shalt thou go,

A haughty, sullen, and vindictive shade.

I will obsequiously attend thee thither,

Thy subject brother, a submissive shade.

Oh calm a little the fierce turbulence

Of that unconquerable mind ! behold

Me at thy feet ; thou, thou art still my king.

Before I rush to death, I do conjure thee

To grant me pardon . . .

Joc. Thou shalt gain it. Thou,

Eteocles, rise, rise above thy fate.

Ah, pardon him, and render him more guilty.

To his remorse transfer thy sated vengeance.

Ant. And dost thou yet resist ? oh heart of steel !

By prayers, by agonies, thou art not moved.

Nor by the tears of desperation shed

By those thou most shouldst love.

Joc. My son, my son,

Refuse not to thy brother one embrace.

There yet is time ; ah, from thy fame avert

Such stigma!

Ete. Mother, 'tis thy will? ... 'tis well ...
I yield ... come, then, oh brother, to the arms
Of thy expiring brother ... slain by thee ...
Come, to receive in this my last embrace
Brother ... from me ...¹ the death thou meritest.

Joc. Ah, treason!

Ant. Polinices! ... Brother! ... slain ...

Pol. Art thou now satisfied?

Ete. I am revenged! ...

I die ... yet thee I hate ...

Pol. I also die; ...

But pardon thee.

Joc. Behold the work complete.

These sons of incest, these unnatural brothers,
Murder each other: mother, dost thou see,
To whom there now remains nothing to lose?
Ye gods, than us more guilty, prove your being
By pealing thunders and volcanic fires,
Tempesting heaven and earth: or gods there are not.
But what do I behold? Beneath my feet
Yawns the unfathomable, dire abyss!

Ant. My mother ...

Joc. Ah! I see them burst asunder
The black, interminable realms of death:
Thou lurid shade of Laius, dost thou stretch
To me thy arms? to a flagitious wife?
What do I see? Thou shew'st thy pierced breast?
Thy hands and face, with clotted gore defiled,
Thou weapest, and dost cry out aloud "Revenge!"

¹ Feigning to embrace him, with a dagger he stabs him.

Who made that horrid wound ? what impious wretch ?
'Twas Œdipus thy son, whom, in thy bed,
Yet reeking with thy life-blood, I received.
Who from another quarter beckons me ?
I hear a noise which makes e'en Pluto tremble ;
Behold the crash, the gleam, of warlike swords.
Sons of my son, my sons, ferocious shades,
Brothers, does strife e'en after death subsist ?
Oh, Laius, separate them. But, behold,
Close at their side the grinning furies stand !
Vengeful Eumenides, I am their mother ;
Rack me with that ensanguined, snaky scourge,
This form incestuous, which could being give
To such unnatural wretches. Furies, why,
Ah why, delay ! I rush to meet you . . .

Ant. ¹ Mother !

¹ Antigone supports her, and Jocasta falls in her arms.

ANTIGONE.

A TRAGEDY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CREON.	ARGIA.
HÆMON.	<i>Guards.</i>
ANTIGONE.	<i>Soldiers of Hæmon.</i>

SCENE,—The Palace in Thebes.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Argia.

Ar. Argia, thou art now at last in Thebes . . .
After the rapid journey I need rest . . .
Oh how, as if by flight, I came from Argos !
Faithful Menætes, thou, infirm with age,
Couldst scarce keep pace with me. But yet I am
In Thebes. The shades of night a friendly aid
Lent to my enterprise ; unseen I entered.
This is the horrible palace of my spouse,
Too well beloved, this is the tomb and cradle.
Oh, Polinices ! . . . thy insidious brother
Here, in thy blood, his thirst for vengeance sated.
Thy squalid shade, yet unavenged, still strays
Around these walls, and spurns sepulchral rites
In impious Thebes, so near thy cruel brother.

It seems thou beckonest me to Argos still . . .
To thee a sure asylum Argos was ;
Ah, hadst thou never moved thy feet from thence !
I come, I come, for thy most sacred dust.
Antigone alone, that faithful sister,
By thee so justly and so much beloved,
With pious hands can aid me to regain it.
Oh, how I love her ! oh, what soothing thoughts
Will give a transient softness to my grief,
In seeing, knowing, and embracing her !
Yes, here, with her, upon that gelid urn,
Which should belong to me, I come to weep :
And shall belong : a sister to a wife
Cannot refuse it. Ah ! our only child,
Behold the gift I bring thee back to Argos ;
Thy sole inheritance ; thy father's urn !
But where does my incautious sorrow lead me ?
Shall I, an Argive, be in Thebes, and not
Remember where I am ? I wait the hour
In which Antigone may venture forth.
How shall I know her ? . . . And should I be seen ? . . .
Oh, heavens ! 'tis now that I begin to tremble ; . . .
Alone in Thebes . . . oh ! . . . heard I not a step ?
Alas ! what can I say ? . . . By what contrivance ? . . .
I will conceal myself.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Antigone.

Ant. This is the palace :
The night is dark : quick ; let me hence depart . . .
What ? do I hesitate ? and do my feet
Stagger beneath my weight ? Why tremble thus ?

Whence all this apprehension ? Do I plan
Aught that is criminal ? Do I fear death ?
I fear alone not to atchieve my task.
Oh, Polinices ! oh, beloved brother !
Oh, wept till now in vain ! . . . The time is past
For tears alone . . . now is the time for action.
I feel myself superior to my sex :
Yes, on this day, in spite of cruel Creon,
Thou shalt from me receive funereal honours :
Yes, thou shalt now receive a sister's life,
Or from her hands the last sad obsequies.
Oh Night, who on this spot, of light unworthy,
Shouldst reign eternally, oh pall thyself
In thy most dense, impenetrable glooms,
To second thus my lofty purposes.
Conceal me from the vigilant espial
Of royal satellites : I hope in thee.
Ye gods, if ye have not expressly sworn,
That, in this Thebes, no pious ceremony
Shall e'er be consummated, I but ask
So much of life as may ensure performance
To this one act of sisterly affection.
Let me press forward : holy is the office :
A holy impulse urges me to action,
A lofty impulse of fraternal love . . .
But who pursues me ? Ah ! I am betrayed . . .
A female comes to me ? Who art thou ? speak . . .

SCENE THE THIRD.

*Argia, Antigone.**Ar.* I am a child of woe.*Ant.* What seekest thou

Within these thresholds at so late an hour?

Ar. I . . . seek . . . Antigone . . .

Ant. But who art thou?

Know'st thou Antigone? To her art known?

What wantest thou with her? 'Twixt her and thee

What common interest?

Ar. That of grief and pity . . .

Ant. Pity? Darest thou pronounce that word in
Thebes?

Know'st not that Creon reigns in Thebes? Perchance
He is a stranger to thee?

Ar. A few hours

I've been in Thebes.

Ant. And darest thou, in this palace,
By stealth, a stranger, introduce thyself?

Ar. If in this palace I a stranger am,
It is the fault of Thebes: here I should not
Hear myself so accosted.

Ant. What say'st thou?

Where wert thou born?

Ar. In Argos.

Ant. Fatal name!

With horror it inspires me! Had it been
Always unknown to me, I had not lived
In everlasting tears.

Ar. If such distress
Argos in thee excites, Thebes causes me
Perpetual regret.

Ant. There is a tone
That moves me in thy accents. I would sooth
Thy griefs by sympathy, if any griefs
Except my own could move me. I should be
As much disposed to listen to thy tale,

As thou couldst be to tell it ; but, alas !
Time now to me is wanting, who lament
A much-loved brother.

Ar. Ah ! it must be she :

Antigone thou art . . .

Ant. . . . But . . . thou . . .

Ar. 'Tis she.

I am Argia ; the unhappy widow
Of thy loved brother.

Ant. What is it I hear ?

Ar. My only hope, my only consolation,
Beloved sister, I at last embrace thee.
Scarce hadst thou spoken, ere thy tones recalled
The voice of Polinices : 'twas a sound
Inspiring boldness in my trembling heart,
And drew me from my hiding place to meet thee.
How blest am I ! . . . I find thee . . . Suffer me,
Ah, do thou grant, that, 'mid embraces kind,
To my long-pent-up tears, upon thy bosom
I may, at last, give unrestrain'd indulgence.

Ant. Ah, how I tremble ! Daughter of Adrastes,
Art thou in Thebes ? within these guilty thresholds ?
In Creon's power ! Ah, unexpected sight !
Sight not less dear than painful !

Ar. In this palace,
In which thou hoped'st to enjoy my presence,
And where I hoped for thine, is this thy welcome ?

Ant. Dear art thou to me, more than a sister
dear . . .

Ah, Polinices knew how much I loved thee ;
To me, thy countenance alone was strange ;
'Thy manners, disposition, and thy heart,
'Thy mighty love for him, I knew it all.

E'en as he loved I love thee: but I wish'd not,
Nor wish I now, to see thee in this palace . . .
A thousand fatal perils here surround thee.

Ar. Canst thou suppose me capable of fear,
Now my loved Polinices is no more?
What is there left to lose, what to desire?
Let me once fold thee to my breast and die.

Ant. Here thou may'st have a death unworthy of
thee.

Ar. Die howsoe'er I may, if that I die
Upon the tomb of my beloved husband,
That death will be most worthy, and most welcome.

Ant. What is it that thou say'st? . . . alas! . . . his
tomb!

To him, who is thy husband and my brother,
A little dust to cover his dead body
In Thebes, within his very palace gates,
Is interdicted.

Ar. But the unburied corse?

Ant. Lies on the plain, exposed to beasts of prey.

Ar. To the plain I fly.

Ant. Ah, check thy eagerness!

Creon, the barbarous Creon, swoln with pride,
From the possession of the usurped throne,
Braves fearlessly the laws, the ties of nature,
And, more than these, the gods; not satisfied
With interdicting from the sons of Argos
All sepulture, a barbarous death awaits
Those, who, in secret, give to them a tomb.

Ar. My spouse a prey to wild beasts on the plain!
And through that very plain e'en now I passed.
And did I leave thee there? . . . Now the sixth day
Dawns since he fell transfix'd by his fierce brother;

And uninterr'd, and naked there he lies !
His bones there "welter to the parching winds,"
From his paternal palace thus by force
Excluded ? and a mother suffers it ?

Ant. Beloved Argia, thou dost not yet know
The extent of our unparallel'd misfortunes.
No sooner had Jocasta seen accomplish'd
The horrid fratricide, (ah, wretched queen !)
She shed no tears, nor made the air resound
With loud laments : unutterable grief
All speech, all natural emotion, palsied ;
Her stony eye-balls, motionless and dry,
Upon the ground she fix'd : from Erebus,
The shades of murder'd Laius, of her sons,
Stabb'd interchangeably each by the other,
With a tremendous vehemence she summon'd.
They rose before her eyes ; for a long time,
Upon the spectral visions it had raised,
Her madden'd phantasy did strangely feed
With passionate eagerness : she struggled long,
And mid reiterated throes of anguish,
At last regain'd her reason : by her side
She saw her matrons, and her desolate daughter.
She was resolved to die, but spake it not ;
And thus she feigned, the better to delude us . . .
Incautious as I was, I was deluded.
I ought not to have left her. She made shew
Of wishing to give nature the repose
It so much wanted ; I indulged her wish,
And from her side departed : she had snatched
The sword, from his yet palpitating side,
Of Polinices ; with more promptitude,
Than I can tell it thee, in her own breast

Plunged it, and fell, and breathed her latest sigh . . .
And I, why do I live ? . . . the impure remnant
Of such an impure race, I also ought
To plunge the same sword in my lonely heart :
But pity seized me for my sightless father,
My wretched father, neither dead nor living.
For him have I endured the abhorred light ;
And for his tremulous age preserve myself.

Ar. For *Œdipus* ? . . . On him should rather fall,
On him alone, the horror of his crimes.
Does he then live, and *Polinices* die ?

Ant. Ah, wretched *Œdipus*, hadst thou but seen
him?

He of our *Polinices* is the sire,
And pangs e'en greater than his fault endures.
Laden with sorrow, indigent, and blind,
A banished man, a wanderer, he goes
From Thebes. The tyrant dared to drive him thence.
Ah, wretched *Œdipus* ! to tell his name
He will not venture : on our hated heads,
On Creon, Thebes, and even on the Gods,
Blasphemous imprecations he will heap.
I had decreed myself to be the prop
Of his blind, vacillating feebleness ;
But I was torn from him by force, and here
Constrain'd to tarry : thus the Gods might will ;
For scarcely had my father left the city,
Ere Creon, the unheard-of prohibition
Touching the sepulture of Argives slain
Promulgated ; and who, except myself,
In Thebes, had ventured to defy its penance ?

Ar. Who, if not I, should share with thee the toil ?
Here Heaven impell'd me wisely. To obtain

Of thee the honour'd relics I came hither :
Beyond my hope, I here arrive in time
To see again, and to my bosom clasp
That form adored ; to wash with my warm tears
That execrable wound ; to pacify,
With rites funereal, the unquiet shade . . .
Why do we longer tarry ? Sister, come . . .

Ant. Yes, to this holy office let us go ;
But go, like victims, to appointed death ;
I ought to do it, and I wish to die :
I have nothing in the world except my father,
And he is torn from me ; death I expect,
And death I wish for. Leave me to construct it—
Thou, who shouldst life still prize—that funeral pile,
Which will unite me with my much-loved brother.
E'en while he lived his soul and mine were one :
Ah, may one flame consume our forms, and leave
One undistinguishable heap of dust.

Ar. And ought not I to die ? What dost thou say ?
Dost thou thus wish to conquer me in grief ?
Equals we were in love ; do I say equals ?
No, mine was most profound. Ah, deeper far
Is a wife's love than sisters can conceive !

Ant. Argia, I will not dispute with thee
About our love : thy death I will oppose.
Thou art a widow : what a husband thou
Hast lost I know : but thou, like me, of incest
Art not the fruit : thou hast a mother still :
Like mine, thy father is not blind, or outcast ;
Nor—worse than all of these—a father guilty.
The more propitious gods to thee have given
No brothers, who have emulously bathed
Each in the other's blood their murderous swords.

Think it not hard, then, if I, so far severed
From thee by woes unparallel'd in life,
As one that's incommunicably stricken,
Covet self-sacrifice unshared by any.
Ere I was born my life was forfeited.
Return to Argos . . . Hast thou not forgotten ?
Thou still hast there a living pledge of love ;
There, in thy child, thou hast the living image
Of Polinices : ah ! return to Argos ;
Rejoice the heart of thy despairing father,
Who knows not where thou art ; go, I conjure thee :
No eye hath seen thee on these thresholds yet ;
Yet thou hast time. Leave me alone to brave
The fatal prohibition.

Ar. Ah, my son ?
I love him ; yes, I love thee : but wouldst thou
That I should fly, if death is here decreed
For Polinices ? Thou misjudgest me.
Adrastes will protect my little one,
To him will be a father. I, alas !
Should bring him up in tears ; while he should be
To courage and to vengeance disciplined.
There is no threat, no terror, that can scare me
From the beholding his beloved corse.
My Polinices, shall another yield thee
The last commemorative obsequies ?

¹ The literal translation of the passage in the original, is—

“ Ah, be not then offended, if I wish
To die alone ! ”

I hope, that, in this instance, I may be excused from obeying an impulse, which almost involuntarily led me to amplify the passage.

Ant. Wilt yield thy neck to the Theban battle-axe?

Ar. It is the penalty that's infamous,
And not the punishment. The infamy
Will fall on Creon should we be condemn'd.
All will feel horror when they hear his name;
Pity when they hear ours...

Ant. And wilt thou take
From me such glory?

Ar. I will see my husband,
And die upon his bosom. Tell me, sister,
What right hast thou my right to controvert?
Thou who didst see him die, and livest yet...

Ant. Now I believe thee equal to myself.
At first, I felt myself, against my will,
Constrained to ascertain what female fears
Might in thy bosom lurk: I doubted not
The depth of thy affection, but thy courage.

Ar. Who is not made courageous by despair?
But, if I merited thy brother's love,
Could I in thought, or action, be ignoble?

Ant. Pardon me, sister: truly do I love thee;
I tremble; and thy destiny alarms me.
But thou'rt determined? Let us then depart.

With the devoted race of *Ædipus*,
May Heaven confound thee not! The night appears
More black than usual: certainly the gods
For us have darken'd it. Take special care,
Sister, to check thy tears; more than aught else
They would betray us. The fierce satellites
Of Creon rigorously guard the plain:
To them may nought betray us, till the flames
Consuming the inanimate body, blaze.

Ar. I will not weep;... but thou;... wilt thou not
weep?

Ant. We will weep silently.

Ar. Art thou informed

On what part of the plain his body lies?

Ant. Let us depart: I know where it was thrown
By Creon's impious mercenaries. Come.

Lugubrious torches I will take with me:

Some sparks with which to light them, we will there
From flint elicit. Hence, without delay!

Silently bold accompany my steps.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Creon, Hæmon.

Cre. But what? Thou only in my joy, oh son,
Takest no part? Thy father thou beholdest
Upon the throne of Thebes; he has secured
The sceptre as thy firm inheritance.
Whence then these lamentations? Dost thou grieve
For Œdipus, or his devoted race?

Hæm. Does my compassion, then, for Œdipus,
And his descendants, seem to thee a crime?
Oh father, from the throne there issued not,
On the dire day on which thou didst ascend it,
Such an auspicious and absorbing radiance,
At least to my dimm'd eyes, as to dispel
The boding images that flitted round it.
Thou, perhaps, one day may'st bitterly repent
The acquisition of the Theban sceptre.

Cre. I rather should repent, if need there were
Of penitence, that, for so long a time,
I had submissive been to guilty nephews,

Flagitious children of incestuous parents.
But if they have, for their atrocious birth,
By a still more atrocious death atoned,
Let everlasting silence be their doom.
Scarce is their destiny fulfill'd, when, lo !
O'er Thebes the day-star more benignly rises,
The air is more serene, the gods-themselves
Regard us more propitiously : ah, yes,
I feel exulting hope of better days.

Hæm. All expectation, but of wretchedness,
Is baffled by th' event, amid the ruin
And death of those, to whom, by ties of blood,
We are most closely join'd. A king of Thebes,
(For King of Thebes he still must be accounted)
Œdipus, exiled, blind, and fugitive,
To universal and astonished Greece,
Presents a spectacle ne'er seen before :
Two brothers, murderers of each other ; brothers
Of their own sire ; sons of incestuous mother,
Sister to thee, and by her own hands slain :
Thou seest a horrid mixture of all names ;
A horrid chaos of distress and slaughter.
Behold the auspices, behold the track,
By which thou hast ascended to the throne.
Ah, father ! canst thou possibly be joyful ?

Cre. Œdipus, only, with his longer tarriance
On this contaminated spot, had given
A signal to the vengeance of the gods ;
It was our duty to get rid of him.
But thou hast not, without omission, stated
All our afflictions. Impious Œdipus !
What hast thou not cost me ? I also shed
Tears for a son beloved ; thy elder brother,

Menæceus, he, in whom the foolish frauds,
The lying, and pernicious prophecies,
Of a Tiresias, credence did obtain :
Menæceus, to self-sacrifice devoted,
To save his country ; by self-murder slain ;
While Œdipus yet lives ? Perpetual exile
Is a light vengeance for his many crimes.
But let him bear with him to other shores,
That which will follow him where'er he goes,
The malediction of the angry gods.
Our tears will not undo what has been done ;
'Tis now our duty to forget the past,
And to grasp fortune, while we may, by force.

Hæm. Unstable goddess, to secure her smiles
I'll not compel my heart ! Oh, father, fear,
For there is cause, the anger of the gods !
Thy cruel prohibition, that prevents
The haughty and unburied shades of Greece
From passing Acheron, will wake their vengeance.
What art thou doing ? With prosperity,
And with a throne, elated, know'st thou not
That Polinices boasts a royal birth,
Sprung from a mother who to thee was sister ?
And shall he lie dishonour'd on the plain ?
At least permit, that the unburied corse
Of him, who is thy nephew, may be burnt.
Ah, to the sad Antigone, who sees
Of all her family the timeless end,
The body yield of her beloved brother.

Cre. As were her impious brothers, is not she
Of Œdipus the offspring ?

Hæm. As 'twas theirs,
The throne of Thebes by inheritance is hers.

Thou surely wouldst not scruple for a kingdom,
To barter a dead body ?

Cre. She is my foe . . .

Hæm. Believe it not.

Cre. Loves she not Polinices ?

Her father too ? Creon she then abhors.

Hæm. Wouldst thou, oh heavens ! that she should
not feel,

Or for her father, or her brothers, pity ?

Perhaps, if she were inhuman, she might gain
A more distinguished place in thy esteem.

Cre. No ; not esteem her more, but hate her less.
A monarch should forestall another's hate,
And deem each man a foe that he's offended.

I have from fierce Antigone removed
Every pretext, in banishing her father.

Had they together both in exile gone,

They might have found, as wanderers, a king,
Who, under the affected veil of pity,

Conceal'd a wish his empire to augment ;

And who, in their defence, might come to Thebes
As did Adrastes, arm'd. I hear thee blame

My prohibition, son, to which by motives

Deep, yet unfit for thy partaking in them,

I was impell'd. They will be known to thee ;

And thou wilt see, that, though it may appear
A cruel law, 'tis indispensable.

Hæm. The cause unknown to me ! dost thou say so ?
I fear that thou art ignorant of the effects.

Yes, for her exiled father, for her throne

Usurp'd unjustly, for th' unburied corpse

Of Polinices, without seeking it,

Antigone in Thebes may find revenge.

The people, by thy prohibition stung,
Murmur, and rail at it without disguise ;
They long for its evasion ; and, at length,
Will openly infringe it.

Cre. Be it so.

It is my wish ; that I may have the life
Of him who first may venture to infringe it.

Hæm. Ah ! what fierce enemy can counsel thee
Thus to contribute to thy own destruction ?

Cre. My love for thee is my sole counsellor :
Of what thou blamest thou shalt reap the fruit.
Long have the citizens in Thebes been wont
To witness crimes of darker hue than these ;
What can they now intend, but to submit
And to be silent ?

Hæm. Oft beneath such silence
Vengeance lies couch'd . . .

Cre. The silence of the few ;
But in the silence of an entire people
Lie hidden fear, and abject servitude.
Ah cease, oh son, to oppose thy father's views !
No object of solicitude have I
More dear, or more important, than thyself :
Thou only now remain'st to me ; alone
Shall reap the fruits of my anxieties.
Perhaps thou intendest, ere his days are spent,
To prove thyself ungrateful to thy father !
But whence this clank of fetters and of arms ?

Hæm. Ah, who advances ? . . . In hard fetters bound
Two ladies dragg'd along ? . . . Antigone ! . . .

Cre. Th' incautious virgin in my snares hath
fallen ;
And ill can she escape.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Guards, with Torches.

Antigone, Argia, Creon, Hæmon:

Cre. What is the crime these virgins have committed?

Ant. I will declare it.

Cre. Let them be conducted
A little further.

Ant. In thy sight behold me
Mine own accuser. I have defied thy laws :
On the funereal pyre I have burn'd my brother.

Cre. And thou shalt have the threaten'd recompense ;
From me, without delay, thou shalt receive it.—
But thou, whose face I do not recognise,
Thou, whose attire bespeaks thee here a stranger,
Who art thou? Speak...

Ar. The rival of her virtue.

Hæm. Ah, father, calm thy anger ! female boldness
Deserves not the resentment of a king.

Cre. Resentment? What sayst thou, misdeeming
youth !
An unperturbed judge I listen to them :
Death is already theirs : let this strange lady
First tell her name, and then they both shall have
The challenged retribution.

Ant. I alone
Will have that retribution. On the plain
I found this lady ; it was I that shewed
To her my brother's corse ; by Heaven conducted,

Thy satellites' unwary vigilance
I baffled; and invited her to aid me
In such a holy office: she complied:
And with her hand gave me a little help.
I know not who she is; in Thebes ne'er saw her;
Perchance she is from Argos, and intended
T' embrace, but not to burn, some of her friends,
Who in the battle fell ...

Ar. Now, now, indeed,
Should I be guilty, and should well deserve
The direst punishment, if, urged by fear,
I dared to disavow a deed so sacred.
Flagitious king! learn then my name; exult,
And triumph, when thou hear'st it ...

Ant. Ah! be silent ...

*Ar.*Adrastes' daughter; Polinices' spouse;
I am Argia.

Hæm. What is it I hear?

Cre. Oh, worthy pair! ye are by Heaven delivered
Into my hands: of its just punishment
The heavens have chosen me the minister.
But, gentle lady, hast thou not brought with thee
The tender pledge of thy too transient love?
For thou art mother of a little heir
Of Thebes; where is he? he can also boast
The blood of Œdipus: Thebes longs to see him.

Hæm. Oh! I am horror-stricken ... to hear thee,
shudder ...

Thou, who hast lost a son, dar'st thou with jeers
To exacerbate a wretched mother's woe?
One mourns a husband; one a brother mourns;
And thou canst mock them? 'tis too horrible! ...

Ant. Oh thou too worthy son for such a father!

Do not degrade us with thy intercession :
Where Creon reigns to be adjudged to death,
Is a sure proof of lofty innocence.

Cre. Pour out, pour out, thy impotent upbraidings ;
For they offend not me : thou art most welcome,
So as thou hast it, to make light of death.

Ar. On me turn all thy rage ; on me alone !
Hither I came alone, unknown to all,
By stealth ; an entrance in these thresholds gain'd :
By night, on purpose to defy thy laws.
The bosom of Antigone, 'tis true,
Swell'd with suppress'd resentment ; she revolved
A thousand schemes ; but silently she bore
The horrid prohibition ; and had never,
Had I not hither come, incurr'd its penance.
He is the criminal that plans the crime :
On the contriver falls the penalty.

Ant. Ah, trust her not : inopportune compassion,
Vain generosity, her words inspire.
That she, by stealth, these thresholds past is true,
But then she knew not thy despotic law :
She sought me here ; trembling and apprehensive ;
And, at my hand, required the fatal urn
Of her beloved lord. Hence, 'tis apparent
The fame of thy inhuman prohibition
Had not reach'd Argos. I do not pretend
That she did hate thee not as well as me,
(Who does not hate thee ?) but she feared thee more ;
She hoped to be invisible to thee,
(Too credulous, alas !) and fly from hence
With the possession of the sacred ashes,
To bear them back to Argos, and enshrine them

There in a consecrated monument.
Not these my hopes, who, from the first conception
Of this design, aspired to be thy victim,
And to be summon'd thus to brave thy presence :
To be there I exult ; and to thee swear,
That much as she, nay more than she, I hate thee ;
That I, the unextinguishable flame
Of hatred and revenge, with which I burn,
Into her breast transfused : mine is the pride,
Mine is the hardihood, and all the rage
With which she now invests herself, is mine.

Cre. Perfidious pair ! in vain each strives to prove
Herself proficient most in infamy.

I shall soon shew to you, betwixt you two,
Which is the vilest. Death, most infamous,
Such as is fitting, waits you both ; ah ! then
Another rivalry of tears, and prayers,
Of groans, will ye exhibit.

Hæm. Oh, my father !

To death most infamous ? That cannot be :
Thou wilt not do it, no ; to mitigate
Thy bitter vengeance, if compassion may not,
Reflection may constrain thee. Of Adrastes,
A potent king, Argia is the daughter ;
Thou hast had proof Adrastes knows the way
To Thebes, and he may visit us once more.

Cre. Then, ere Adrastes visit us once more,
Argia shall be immolated. What ?

Dost think by fear to make me pity feel ?

Ar. Adrastes cannot now return to Thebes ;
The heavens, the time, to him are unpropitious ;
His troops, his treasures, and his arms, exhausted,
He cannot now avenge me. Fear not, Creon !

Slay me, ah, slay me, and it will not be
That now Adrastes can chastise thee for it.
Yes, be Argia slain ; since to her murderer
No consequence of evil can ensue ;
But spare, ah, spare Antigone ; for her,
And in her cause, by thousands and by thousands,
Desperate avengers will arise in Thebes.

Ant. Ah cease, oh sister ! do not thus misjudge
The tyrant thou accostest : he is cruel :
But not by chance, or to no purpose, cruel.
I now have hopes for thee ; I see already
That I suffice for him, and I exult.
He wills to have the throne, thou hast it not :
But, by a misadventurous right, that throne,
Which he desires, which he usurps, is mine.
Ambition points me out, and me alone,
To be his victim.

Cre. Thine, sayst thou, this throne ?
Infamous progeny of incest, death,
And not a kingdom, is your heritage.
Did not thy impious brothers prove this truth,
The murderers of each other ?

Ant. Impious thou,
Impious and vile ! who to the deed of death
Didst goad them on by fraudulent contrivance.
If 'twas our crime to be our brother's children,
It was our punishment to be thy nephews.
Thou wast the author of the guilty war ;
Thou the fomentor of fraternal hate ;
Thou artfully didst fan the angry flame ;
One thou didst instigate, the other flatter,
And both thou didst betray. And by such arts
Thou clear'dst the way to infamy and the throne.

Hæm. Art thou determined on thine own destruction?

Ant. I am determined, that, for once at least,
The tyrant shall hear truth. Do I see one
Around him that dare speak it to him? Oh!
If thou the agonies of thy remorse,
As thou the tongues of all mankind couldst silence,
How perfect then, oh Creon, were thy joy!
But even more so than thou art to others,
To thyself hateful, in thy restless eye,
Thy restless and thy circumspective eye,
Both crime and punishment are legible.

Cre. There was no need of fraudulent contrivance
To goad to death the abominable brothers
Of their own father: all the angry gods
Were emulous t' accelerate that death.

Ant. Why dost thou name the gods? What god
hast thou

Except the expedient for thyself alone?
To this omnivorous deity, thy friends,
Thy son, thy fame itself, if these thou hadst,
Thou holdst thyself in readiness to immolate.

Cre. Hast thou aught else to say to me? Thou
know'st

That different offsprings different gods appease.
Thou art a victim to the infernal destined,
The last, and worthy of thy impious race,
Thou shalt be offered as a fierce atonement.

Hæm. Father, suspend a little the fulfilment
Of the dread sentence. I first ask of thee
A transient audience, to communicate
To thee some matters of the last importance.

Cre. Some unmolested hours they yet may pass

Of the unfinished night. I have determined,
Within myself, the moment of her doom.
Soon as the sun arises I will hear thee.

Ar. Alas! thou speakest only of my sister?
Now, indeed, I do tremble. Wilt thou not
Condemn me with Antigone to death?

Cre. No more delay: let them be both confined
Within the horrors of the darkest dungeon.

Ar. Together we shall go.

Ant. Ah, sister, yes.

Cre. They shall be separated. I myself
Will be the keeper of Antigone.
Let us depart. Guards, to another dungeon
Consign Argia.

Hæm. Oh, 'tis too horrible!

Ant. Ah, come...

Ar. Sister, farewell.

Hæm. I will, at least,
Pursue their steps.

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Creon, Hæmon.

Cre. I am prepared to give thee audience.
Thou saidst, oh son, that I from thee should hear
Matters of import high: at the same time
Thou may'st, perchance, from my lips hear the same.

Hæm. A suppliant I approach thee: to confront
The first and fierce emotions of thy rage
I deem'd unwise: now that it somewhat yields
To reason's influence, I come, though alone,

The organ of the Theban multitude,
Thee, to conjure, oh father, to use pity.
Wilt thou refuse me this indulgence, father?
Two pious ladies have infringed thy law;
But who would not have broken such an edict?

Cre. Who, but thyself, would dare to intercede
For those who have defied it?

Hæm. Nor dost thou
Deem in thy heart their sacred enterprise
Worthy of death; ah no! I think thee not,
Nor art thou, so unnatural and unjust.

Cre. Thebes and my son may call me at their will
Cruel, I am contented to be just.
T' obey all laws, whate'er those laws may be,
All are alike required. To Heaven alone
Are kings accountable for what they do:
And there is neither age, nor rank, nor sex,
That palliates th' audacious turpitude
Of incomplete obedience. To permit
A few delinquents to remain unpunished
Gives license to the many.

Hæm. Didst thou deem,
When thou didst frame thy law, that two such ladies
Should be the first its penance to defy?
A wife, a sister, emulously both
Rising above their sex? . . .

Cre. Hear me, oh son;
From thee I ought not any thing to hide.
Or thou know'st not, or thou will'st not to know,
Or thou pretendest not to fathom them;
I therefore wish to explain my schemes to thee.
I thought, I hoped, . . . what do I say? . . . by force
I would constrain Antigone alone

To be the first in Thebes to break my law ;
At last I have obtain'd my heart's desire ;
Antigone has fallen in the snare ;
The useless law may now be abrogated . . .

Hæm. Oh earth ! oh heavens ! and do I call thee
father ?

Cre. Ungrateful son ; . . . or dull of apprehension,
For such my love would fain account thee yet :
I am thy father : if thou hold me guilty,
I am so for thy sake.

Hæm. I clearly see
The execrable means by which thou hopest
My fortunes to advance. Disastrous throne !
Thou never shalt be mine, if, by such means,
Thou art to be obtain'd.

Cre. I fill that throne,
That throne is mine which thou rejectest thus.
If to a father, as becomes a son,
Thou canst not speak, speak to him as thy king.

Hæm. Unhappy son ! . . . my father ; . . . pardon ;
. . . hear ; . . .

Thou wilt not reap the fruit of such a scheme,
And wilt degrade thy name. Absolute power,
E'en in the king most absolute, avails not
To drown the cry of universal nature.
All feel compassion for the pious virgin :
Thy scheme will be discover'd by the Thebans ;
Discover'd and abhorr'd, perhaps not suffer'd.

Cre. And darest thou welcome first the impious
doubt,
The doubt by all men hitherto unspoken,
Whether or not my will should be obeyed ?
Save from my will, my arbitrary power

Disdains to hear of limit or controul.
Thou hast not taught me how to wield the sceptre.
I soon shall make in every Theban heart
All passions dumb, except the one of fear.

Hæm. My intercessions, then, are unavailing?
My fond reliance that thou wouldst relent?

Cre. Utterly vain.

Hæm. The progeny of kings,
Two ladies, then, to opprobrious death are doom'd,
Since, at their hands, due rites of sepulture
A brother, and a husband, has received?

Cre. One is thus doom'd.—Little the other's fate
Imports; as yet I know it not.

Hæm. Me then,
Me then with her shalt thou consign to death.
Hear, father, hear; I love Antigone;
Long have I loved her; loved her more than life:
And ere thou tear'st Antigone from me,
Thou wilt be forced to take away my life.

Cre. Ungrateful son! Thus dost thou love thy father?

Hæm. I swear I love thee, e'en as I love her.

Cre. Vexatious hindrance! In thy father's heart
Thou hast infix'd an unexpected wound,
A mortal wound. Fatal will be thy love
To my repose, to thine, and to the fame
And glory of us both! The world holds not
Aught precious in my sight compared to thee...
Too much I love thee, herein lies my crime...
Is this thy recompense for such affection?
Thou lovest her, entreatest for her safety,
Who mocks my power, who holds me in contempt,
And dares to tell me so; and in her breast

Conceals ambitious wishes for the throne ?
This throne, the source of my solicitude,
Because thou may'st one day inherit it.

Hæm. Thou art mistaken : in her pious breast,
I swear, there lives not one ambitious thought :
No other thoughts are rooted in thy nature.
Hence thou know'st not, nor canst thou ever know,
The mighty power of love, before whose throne
All projects of advancement prostrate fall.
Thou didst not always deem Antigone
Thy enemy, yet have I always loved her :
To change, with change of circumstance, my love,
Was more than human nature could perform.
I could be silent, and I held my peace.
Nor, hadst thou not constrain'd me, should I now,
Oh father, have reveal'd my secret fondness.
Oh, heavens ! must she her virgin neck lay down
To the impious axe ? . . . and must I suffer it ?
Must I behold it ? Couldst thou contemplate
With a less haughty and less clouded eye,
Her noble heart, her elevated thoughts,
Her qualities, as rare as they are sublime,
Thou, even as thy son, yea, more than he,
At once wouldst reverence and admire her virtues.
Who dared, beneath the cruel government
Of fierce Eteocles, appear the friend
Of Polinices ? She alone dared do it.
In whom, except in her, did her blind father,
By all deserted, find a pitying friend ?
Lastly, Jocasta, then held dear by thee,
By birth thy sister, to her grief immense,
Afflicted mother, say, what other source
Of comfort had she left ? In all her tears

What solace, what companion, did she find ?
What daughter had she but Antigone ?
Thou say'st she is the child of Cædipus ;
But for a crime, in which she bore no part,
Her virtues make a plenary atonement.
Again I say, the throne is not her object :
Never, oh never, hope to see me happy
At her expense : gods, were she so at mine !
I would not only give the throne of Thebes,
But that of all the world to make her so.

Cre. Does she return thy love with equal love ?

Hæm. There is no love that can compare with mine.
She loves me not ; nor can she ever love me :
If she detest me not, it is enough
To satisfy my heart ; I hope no more :
T' expect more from her heart, who ought to hate
me,
Would be unreasonable.

Cre. But tell me further,

Would she consent to give to thee her hand ?

Hæm. A royal virgin, from whom has been torn,
And torn by impious violence, her brothers,
Her mother, and her father, shall she give
Her hand in marriage ? give it too to me,
Sprung from a blood that's fatal to her race ?
Could I be so presumptuous ? Creon's son,
Could I dare offer her my hand ? . . .

Cre. Thou may'st,

That hand at once restores her life and throne.

Hæm. Too well I know her, and too much I love
her :

Foster'd in weeping, more than ever now
She spends her life in tears. Perhaps hereafter

She may see days less tragical than these,
And may be less averse to listen to me;
Thou mayest then . . .

Cre. Thou vainly dost expect
That I should put our destiny in wardship
To time, and its precarious events.—
Guards, quickly be Antigone brought forth
Into my presence.—She deserves to die;
I may, with justice, sentence her to death;
And, perhaps, 'twould be in me a proof of wisdom,
With summary rigour, to inflict that sentence.
But yet, my son, thou art so dear to me,
That, for thy sake alone, I will consent
To grant her life, to accept her as my daughter,
If she consent to yield to thee her hand.
And can she hesitate to make a choice
Betwixt a scaffold and a monarch's son?

Hæm. Hesitate? no! She will chuse instant death.

Cre. She hates thee then.

Hæm. She loves the dead too well.

Cre. I understand thee. Thou desirest, son,
That I should life preserve in her, who would,
If she had power, take life from me and mine.
Canst thou presume to expect, or ask, so much
Of a fond father who so much loves thee?

SCENE THE SECOND.

Antigone, Creon, Hæmon, Guards.

Cre. Approach: thou findest me, Antigone,
Much more disposed to indulgence than before.
Not that I deem thy enterprise less guilty,
Or the annexed infliction less thy due.

Paternal love, more than the love of justice,
Hath wrought this change. My son, most fervently,
Hath asked for thee my pardon, and obtain'd it,
Provided that thou pledge thyself . . .

Ant. To what?

Cre. To give him, in my sight, without delay,
A recompense he well deserves . . . thy hand.

Hæm. Pardon, Antigone, I never asked
So great a blessing : he would give thee to me :
I wish alone to rescue thee from death.

Cre. On this condition thou obtain'st my pardon.

Ant. Does Creon offer kindness? Ah! to me
What kindness can he shew so great as death?
Death can alone eternally remove me
From thy detested sight : thou makest happy
Those whom thou thus dost banish from thy presence.
Hæmon, obtain my death ; 'twill be a pledge,
The only one I can accept, of love.
Ah! recollect, oh Hæmon, that it is
The richest gift a tyrant can bestow ;
Which often he denies to those whose hearts
Possess a real, ardent wish for it.

Cre. Wilt thou not alter thy deportment towards
me?

Thou art always proud, always implacable,
Whether thou art condemned, or art absolved.

Ant. Change my deportment? . . . 'twere more
possible

For thee to change thy heart.

Hæm. This is my father :
If thou, Antigone, wilt thus address him,
Thou piercest my sad heart.

Ant. He is thy father ;

Hence all the worth he has ; nor do I find
Any defect, oh Hæmon, in thy nature,
But that thou art his son.

Cre. Peace ;—Clemency
In me was transient as the lightning's flash ;
Already thou art superfluously guilty ;
Nor is it now, or needful, or expedient,
The guilt of thy vituperative tongue.

Ant. The throne, incontrovertibly my right,
Which thou usurpest, makes me too, too guilty.
That throne I do not ask of thee, nor life.
The day on which thou took'st my father from me
I should have asked of thee the gift of death,
Or, with my own hands, on myself bestow'd it,
But there remain'd a duty to perform,
To give due sepulture to my dead brother.
Now that I have that holy task accomplished,
Nothing remains for me to do in Thebes :
If thou dost wish my life, restore my father.

Cre. I offer thee the throne ; and, with that throne,
A spouse thou hatest not ; who loves thee more,
Antigone, than thou abhorrest me ;
Who loves thee more, far more, than his own father.

Ant. Hæmon, and he alone, if not more dear,
Perchance might make my life more bearable.
But what a life 'twould be ? a life dragg'd on
Where thou wert present ? while I still must hear,
Hear from Avernus, th' unavenged shades
Of my dead brothers, whom thou didst betray,
And goad to murder, cry to me for vengeance ?
Can I, a wife, hear this, and tranquilly
Repose in the embraces of the son
Of the destroyer of my family ?

Cre. I comprehend thy meaning. The alliance
Would doubtless be too chaste : if there had been
Another son of *Ædipus*, 'twere he
Thou wouldst deem worthy thy illustrious hand.

Ant. Daughter of *Ædipus*, ah, horrid name !
Daughter of *Creon* only still more horrid !

Hæm. My hope, I see, is too presumptuous !
Blood can alone appease your bitter hate :
Chuse then my blood : spill mine. *Antigone*,
Thy stern refusal does become thee well :
Father, in thee, anger is also just :
I love you both, both equally I love ;
Myself alone I hate.

Wouldst thou, oh *Creon*, sentence her to death,
Permit that she deserve it at thy hands,
By murdering thy son. *Antigone*,
Thou wishest on my sire to wreak thy vengeance ?
Strike ; in this breast thou wilt obtain it fully :
In me, his only, his beloved son,
Thou takest from him : childless thou wilt make him,
Than *Ædipus* more wretched. Why delay ?
Strike ; by insulting thus my father, thou
Dost much more wound than if thou stabb'd my
breast.

Cre. Do not yet utterly despair ; her words
Bespeak less grief than anger. Lady, yield
To reason : in thy hands alone is placed
Thy destiny ; on thee alone depends
Argia, whom thou lov'st so much, for whom,
Far more than for thyself, thou art afflicted :
Of *Hæmon*, whom thou dost not hate, thou art
The arbitress ; . . . of me thou also art ;
Whom, if thou dost abhor beyond all duty,

No less thou oughtest to confess, that I,
Beyond all duty, am to thee indulgent.
This day, that now is ushering in its light,
I yield to thee for thy mature reflection :
At sun-set, death or Hæmon thou must chuse.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Antigone, Hæmon, Guards.

Ant. Ah! why wert thou the son of Creon born?
Or why, at least, didst not resemble him?

Hæm. Ah, hear me.—On this instant, which I feel
To be the last of real life to me,
I fain would speak to thee my inmost thoughts.
Erewhile this confidence was interdicted
By the importunate aspect of my father.
Then know, for my excuse, that I'm the first
To praise, and to appreciate, and admire,
Thy stern refusal, and thy sterner anger.
Rather than dare to offer it to thee,
By a slow fire I would consume this hand;
This hand, which seems to me unworthy of thee,
More than it seems to thee. Thou knowest well
That I do love thee; and thou shalt know well
That I esteem thee. But meanwhile, (ah, state
Of anguish inexpressible!) my life
Suffices not to place thy life in safety! . . .
Oh, that, at least, an inopprobrious death
I could obtain for thee! . . .

Ant. A death in Thebes,
Far more opprobrious than mine can be,
Fell to my mother's and my brothers' lot.
The axe to me seems almost like a triumph.

Hæm. What dost thou speak of? . . . ah, atrocious sight!

I will not see it: will not live to see it.
But hear me, oh Antigone! Perhaps yet
The king might be deluded . . . I speak not,
Thou wouldst not suffer me, nor would I do it,
To recommend aught of thy fame unworthy.

Ant. I brave, but I delude not, e'en a tyrant:
And this thou knowest, Hæmon. Piety,
Fraternal piety, to artifice
Alone could urge me. Shall I now deceive
To save my life? rather would I deceive
To accelerate my death.

Hæm. At least awhile,
Awhile suspend it, though it be so fixed,
Thy lofty and inexorable will.
I ask for nothing that's of thee unworthy:
But yet, if thou canst, only by delay
Give comfort to another; if thou canst
Live without infamy, why shouldst thou be
So cruel to thyself, to me so cruel?

Ant. Hæmon, I cannot do it . . . To myself
I am not cruel: Of Ædipus I'm daughter.
I grieve for thee; but yet . . .

Hæm. I know it well:
Motive to thee of life I ne'er can be;
Yet thy companion certainly in death.
But yet beyond the dreary waves of Styx
All the dear objects of thy lofty heart
Are not translated yet, Antigone:
In a sad life, yet nevertheless in life,
Ædipus and Argia still remain,
And her poor little one, who now grows up .

The living image of thy Polinices;
For whom, perchance, thou wouldst one day desire
The passage to this throne, useless to thee,
To be preserved. Ah! yield a little while.
Thou ought'st to feign thou listenest to my prayers,
And that thou wilt be mine, in case that Creon
Allow an interval for time to lay
On thy most reasonable and lingering grief,
His slowly-working, yet emollient hand.
I too will feign to be appeased with this;
And will, at all events, obtain consent
For some delay of Creon. We may hope,
Meanwhile, for much, from the effects of time:
I never can believe the Argive monarch
Will, to the thrall of ignominious fetters,
Abandon his own daughter. Oftentimes,
Whence least he is looked for, the defender springs.
Ah live; once more I do asseverate
That for myself I ask it not: ah live! . . .
I am resolved to follow thee; and yet
I feel no pity for my own allotment,
Nor shouldst thou feel it for me: for thy blind
And wandering father, for Argia, here
An exile, I bespeak, conjure, thy pity.
Thou may'st from chains release her, to behold
Once more her father, and rejoice his heart.
Ah! be constrain'd, what for thyself thou feel'st not,
To feel for them, compassion! At thy feet
Prostrate, and overwhelm'd with bitter tears,
Hæmon invokes thy pity . . . he conjures it!

Ant. And I conjure thee, now that I have need,
More than I ever had, of constancy,
Do not, in soft tears of effeminate love,

Do not dissolve my heart . . . if potent thus
O'er my fond breast thou be'est, (and that thou art
'These rending conflicts but too well convince me ;)
. . . Help me to save my fame ; help me to die ;
If thou, in verity, dost love Antigone.

Hæm. . . . Alas ! . . . yet I have not deluded thee . . .
'Tis possible . . . all that I've pictured to thee.

Ant. I never can be thine ; why should I live ?
Oh, Heaven ! that I at least had never known
The real cause of my despairing grief.
And if I should, as spouse, unite myself
To thee but in appearance, what would Greece,
In hearing of it, say ? My wretched father,
He who alone for my protracted life
Would be a worthy cause, if ever he
Of such an union heard ! . . . In case that grief,
Torment, and shame, have not destroy'd him yet,
To his paternal heart the horrid news
Would be a mortal stab. Ah, wretched father !
I know too well I ne'er shall see thee more ;
No, never more ; . . . but lonely, and the last
Of all thy children, I will die unspotted.

Hæm. My heart thou rendest ; . . . yet I feel constrain'd

Such a resolve to venerate : for I,
E'en I, to virtue am not quite a stranger . . .
But shall I let thee perish ? . . . Deign to hear,
If thou detest me not, my latest prayer :
At thy side will I plant myself ; the blow,
'The mortal blow, my bosom shall transfix,
Before it reaches thine : on cruel Creon,
'Thou, thus, in part at least, may'st be avenged.

Ant. Live, Hæmon, I command thee . . . Love in us

Is such a crime, that I, by death, atone for't ;
Do thou by life.

Hæm. One, one more, last attempt.
Inhuman father ! sanguinary king,
Thou of a frantic and despairing son
Shalt be constrain'd to hear the latest accents.

Ant. Alas ! what is it that thou now contrivest ?
A rebel to thy father ? . . . Ah, avoid
So horrible a stain, or do not hope
That I can love thee.

Hæm. From thy fierce resolve
Can nothing make thee swerve ?

Ant. Nothing ; if thou
Canst not.

Hæm. Thou, then, preparest thyself ? . . .

Ant. Ah, never, . . .
Never to see thee more.

Hæm. In a short time
Thou shalt, I swear, again behold my face.

Ant. Ah stop. Alas ! . . . dost thou not hear me,
Hæmon ?

What wouldst thou do ?

Hæm. Spite of thyself, preserve thee.

Ant. Stop . . .

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Antigone, Guards.

Ant. Heavens ! he hears me not.—Now quickly,
guards,
Again conduct me into Creon's presence.

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

*Creon, Antigone, Guards.**Cre.* Hast chosen?*Ant.* I have chosen.*Cre.* Hæmon?*Ant.* Death.*Cre.* Death thou shalt have.—But take especial heed,

That when the axe is lifted o'er thy head
Thou dost not flinch : the time for penitence
Will then be past. Ill, perhaps, thou wilt sustain
The aspect fierce of death when it approaches ;
Ill, if thou love her, perhaps, thou wilt sustain
Argia's tears ; she, by thy side, is doomed
To breathe her last ; and thou art cause alone
Of her untimely end. Ah ! think of it ;
Thou still hast time . . . I yet exhort thee to it.
Now, what is thy reply ? . . . Thou speakest not ?
Intrepidly and steadily thou lookest ? . . .
Yes, haughty virgin, thou shalt have from me
That which thy contumelious silence asks.
I now regret that I allow'd thee choice
Betwixt my own dishonour and thy death.

Ant. Why dost thou now delay ? Act and be silent.*Cre.* Make a parade of courage at thy will :
We soon shall see how far that courage goes.
Although the appointed moment of thy death
Be not arrived, to gratify thy wish

It shall be hastened. Go, Eurymedon;
Quickly conduct her to the ready scaffold.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Hæmon, Antigone, Creon, Guards.

Hæm. Stop . . . To the scaffold? . . .

Ant. Now, now, guards, make haste . . .

Oh, misadventurous sight! drag me to death.

Leave me, oh Hæmon, leave me! . . . now, farewell.

Hæm. Dare none of you to drag her one step farther!

Cre. Rash youth! Dost menace in thy father's presence?

Hæm. Thus dost thou love me, father? Thus cut short

The day thou granted'st to her?

Cre. 'Tis her will

Thus to precipitate her destiny;

Can I refuse compliance?

Hæm. Hear, oh hear;

Dost thou not know then? Thou art menaced now
With other and most unexpected troubles.

It is reported that the King of Athens,

Theseus, that valiant hero, comes to Thebes

With armed multitudes. O'erwhelmed in tears,

And claiming reparation at his hands,

To him the desolate Argive widows went.

The king attended to their just complaints,

And pledged himself to gain for them the urns

Of their dead husbands; and thou knowest well

That Theseus is no empty promiser.

Propitiate his retributory wrath,

And our disgrace prevent. I ask thee not
Basely to quail at contumelious menace,
But that thou shouldst feel pity for thy Thebes ;
Scarce do the glad notes of returning peace
Freshen the morning gales ; though, for thy sake,
In an unrighteous cause I took up arms ;
What men of prowess now remain in Thebes ?
There lie the valiant in the battailous field,
Valiant no more ; there, on th' ensanguined bed,
Pale and exanimate . . .

Cre. To abject fear

Dost deem it possible for me to yield ?
Say, to what purpose, then, dost thou thus dwell
On distant, dubious, perhaps unfounded, dangers ?
Theseus, that valiant hero, at my hands
Has not demanded yet the Argive urns ;
Nor have I yet refused them to his threats :
Perhaps ere he seeks to treat with me for Argos,
I may anticipate his mediation.
Art thou contented ? Thebes is yet secure ;
I have no wish for war. At last permit
That to her destiny this virgin go.

Hæm. Wilt thou then thus for ever lose thy son ? . . .
In vain thou hopest that a single day
I should survive her. Perhaps to lose thy son
Is but a trifle ; but by this one deed
Thou rushest on a thousand various perils.
Antigone is now absolved ; thyself
Absolved'st her when thou didst abrogate
Thy unjust law. All now are well aware
That thou contrived'st for her sake alone
The abominable snare. Shall Thebes behold
The honour'd daughter of her kings expire

Upon an infamous and bloody scaffold?
Ah, flatter not thyself that thou dost reign
O'er subjects so degraded. Loud laments,
Desperate menaces, and clank of arms,
Are heard already; even now they doubt...

Cre. Enough; enough. Since thou dost will it not,
Thebes shall not see upon a bloody scaffold
The honour'd daughter of their kings expire.
Soldiers, soon as the shades of night descend
Ye shall conduct her to the plain, where lie
Th' unburied heroes. 'Tis no longer lawful
To refuse sepulture to any one:
The heroic Theseus prohibits this:
Let her then have it on the field of battle;
The interment which on others she bestow'd;
Yes, there alive be buried!...

Hæm. What do I hear?
Dost thou dare thus defy both gods and men?
Ere thou canst put thy threat in execution,
Thou from the veins of thy indignant son
Must drain each drop of blood. Buried alive?
Ah impious!... sooner on this very spot
Shall I be slain; reduced to dust and ashes...

Ant. Ah, Hæmon, wilt thou make thyself unworthy
Of my affection? Whatsoe'er he be
He is thy father. Even from my birth
My fate has doomed me to a violent death.
If it be so, what signifies the place,
The time, the manner of my death?

Cre. In vain
Thou wouldst oppose; thou canst not rescue her;
Nor benefit thyself... A wretched father
Thou wilt make me; nought else canst thou perform.

Hæm. To make thee wretched gratifies my soul;
Thou dost deserve it; and thou wilt be so.
The impious throne allures thee to defy
All the most sacred duties of a king,
Of father, and of man: but the more firm
Thou deem'st that throne, the more it shakes beneath
Thy sacrilegious and usurping weight.
... The Thebans 'twixt the father and the son
Clearly distinguish... and there lives, I warn thee,
Who, with a nod, could snatch from thee at once
Thy throne so fraudulently gotten: reign:
I will not give the signal; but, if harm
Befall this virgin, tremble...

Ant. I beseech thee,
Creon, ah quickly, execute thy sentence!
Oh fatal power of adverse destiny!
To my so many unexampled woes,
And to my guilty birth, there wanted nought
But that I should be 'twixt a son and father
The instigator of atrocious rage.

Hæm. Listen to me, to me alone, oh Creon:
Since swords of Athens, and its valiant king,
The prayers of females, or the loud lament
Of frantic multitudes, appal thee not;
Now on thy hard heart may the cry descend,
The terrible cry, of a despairing son;
From whom thou hast by mad ambition torn
All power of self-controul; to whom, alas!
It had been better hadst thou ne'er given life;
And who, on this tremendous day, may make thee
Repent of such a gift.

Cre. No human cry
Suffices to impose a law on Creon.

Hæm. There is a human sword that may suffice
To snap those laws at once.

Cre. And 'tis?...

Hæm. My sword

Cre. Perfidious traitor! Plot thy father's death;
Cut short my days at once! ah, dare to do it!...
Seize on the kingdom; trouble its repose;
Thy father still I am, though thou forget,
And almost seem to scorn, to be my son.
I know not how, nor can I, punish thee:
I have no power, except to love thee still,
And thy degenerate spirit to lament.
Say what of difficult do I atchieve
That is not for thy 'vantage? but ingrate,
And deaf, alas! too much so, thou dost dare
Prefer a love both indiscreet and foolish,
A love not well received, to lofty thoughts
Of policy, to sacred rights of blood.

Hæm. Say, of what rights of blood darest thou to
speak?

Thou art throughout a king: thou canst not love
Thy son: thou only seekest a support
To tyranny. Should I, who sprung from thee,
Feel reverentially for ties of blood?
Thou art my law, my sole preceptor thou,
In cruelty; I follow thee: the goal
Which thou hast shewn to me I first will reach;
I swear I will. What lofty policy,
I pray thee, prompts the open turpitude
Which thou designest? Take thou heed, lest I
Should, in like manner, as thou provest it,
Return thy love... That love engenders crimes;
From it a thousand trespasses result,

Augmenting gloriously; and this thou knowest.

Ant. E'en now I hate thee, if thou dost proceed.
Thou wert the son of Creon long before
Thou wert my lover; strong, infrangible,
Of all ties holiest, is the tie of son.
Think, Hæmon, ah, I do conjure thee, think,
That to this very tie I fall a victim . . .
That I do love thee, Heaven itself bears witness:
Yet I refuse thy hand not to offend
The shades, yet unappeased, of the departed.
Death I prefer, a shameful death I chuse,
That tidings insupportable to him,
Of me, my wretched father may not hear.
Then be not thou refractory; but live
The obsequious son of a flagitious father.

Cre. His fury irritates my bosom less
Than thy compassion. Take her from my sight.
Go, go . . . ah, wert thou once but fairly gone!
Thy presence from the path of rectitude
Alone seduces Hæmon. At the hour,
Which I already have assign'd to thee,
Eurymedon, conduct her to the plain;
And there, at once, give her both death and burial.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Creon, Hæmon, Guards.

Hæm. Before the hour assign'd, thou from the camp
Tidings shalt hear of me.

Cre. Or ere that time
Hæmon will see his error, and repent it.
I might anticipate and thus defeat
Thy idle menaces: but I will give thee

A more convincing proof of my affection,
By trusting to thy elevated heart,
Thy early virtues, which I fain would think
Are in thee, but suspended, not destroy'd.

Hæm. Yes ; I protest that what I shall perform
Shall not disgrace the virtues of my youth.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Creon, Guards.

Cre. I know his temper well : his sense of honour,
More than aught else, can curb its vehemence :
My seeming confidence will much enthrall
The workings of his rage . . . yet perhaps to-day,
Intoxicated as he is with love,
He may resort to force ? . . . But 'twill be easy
For me to watch, deceive, defeat, his steps :
When once Antigone has fallen my victim,
All will be easy . . . Theseus to appease . . .
To impose obedience on the multitude . . .
Regain my son ; all this will be as nothing.
But of Argia how shall I dispose ?
Guards, bring Argia instantly before me.
Her death no longer can promote my schemes ;
And 'tis my interest now to pacify,
While yet I may, the anger of Adrastes :
I have too many enemies already.
I will restore her to her sire in Argos :
This restoration, as 'tis unexpected,
Will yield him more delight ; and thus the stain
Of cruelty, imputed to my nature,
Will not be inconsiderably lessened.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Creon, Argia, Guards.

Cre. Argia, listen to me. Grief sincere,
Love of thy husband, and fond piety,
Conducted thee to Thebes, where thou alone
Hadst never dared to brave my prohibition.

Ar. Thou art mistaken; I alone . . .

Cre. Well . . . well . . .

Thou hadst defied it then, impell'd by pity;
Not from contempt, and as in proud defiance
Of my authority; not to excite
Clamorous disturbances: I can discern
Pity and love from factious disobedience,
Cloaking its close designs with better motives.
I am not cruel as thou mayest account me;
And, as a proof of this, accept thy freedom.
The shades of night protected thy approach;
When the sun sets the shades of night once more
Shall reconduct thee to thy sire in Argos.

Ar. Eternal farewell I have bidden to Argos:
The last remains of murdered Polinices
Are laid in Thebes; in Thebes, or dead or living,
I therefore will remain.

Cre. Dost thou not wish
To see once more thy child, thy sire, thy country?

Ar. I never can desert the sacred ashes
Of my beloved spouse.

Cre. In this, thy wish
I likewise will indulge: thou cam'st by stealth
His ashes to obtain; openly keep them,
And bear the precious burthen back to Argos.

Depart ; and there erect, among thy kindred,
A tomb expressive of thy deep regret,
To thy beloved spouse.

Ar. And is it true ?

Whence can such clemency arise ? And how
Canst thou so differ from thy former self,
And be sincere ?

Cre. Erewhile inflamed with rage
Thou sawest me ; but rage in me is transient ;
Reason and time abate it.

Ar. May kind Heaven
Grant thee a reign both long and prosperous !
Thou then art won to clemency ? What joy
Thy people and thy son will thence derive !
Thou hast at last felt pity for our fate ;
Thou also ceasest, with the name of guilt,
To stigmatise compassion in ourselves ;
And the offence to which thou forced'st us
Thou pardonest in us . . .

Cre. I pardon thee.

Ar. Is not Antigone then safe ?

Cre. I do not
Confound thy fault with her's.

Ar. What do I hear ?
She groans in fetters yet ? . . .

Cre. Question no farther . . .
Prepare for thy departure.

Ar. Shall I go,
And leave in peril my beloved sister ?
Vainly thou hopest it. Thy pardon pleased me
Because I thought she bore in it a part ;
But she is fetter'd yet ? Fierce punishments
Perhaps yet await her ? I will then be fetter'd ;

And I will suffer punishments more fierce . . .

Cre. In Thebes, I will ; not others ; to that will
Of mine all yield. Thou hast infringed my law ;
And yet I pardon thee : thou wouldst construct
Thy husband's funeral pile ; this thou hast done :
Bear back his ashes to thy native Argos ;
I yield those ashes to thee. What more wouldst thou ?
What more darest thou to ask ? Dost thou expect
That I should be accountable to thee ? . . .

Ar. At least permit me to obtain the favour
Of seeing her once more.

Cre. Thou would'st, perchance,
Gain from her intercourse a hardihood
Which, in thyself, thou feel'st not? When light
 thickens

I shall expect thee to depart from Thebes :
If thou wilt not go of thine own accord,
By force thou goest hence.

Ar. Than any death
Thy pardon is more cruel : death, which to all
Thou givest, why to me alone deny it ?
'Tis not that thou art withheld by any fear
Of spilling blood. I am less innocent
Than is Antigone, why should not I
Incur an equal portion of thy fury ? . . .

Cre. Deem it or clemency or punishment
Thy going hence ; it gives me little pain ;
Provided that clear quittance is obtained.—
Guards, to your keeping I entrust her person :
At night-fall to the Omolæan gate
Descend, and bear her to the Argive boundaries :
If she refuse to go, drag her by force.
In the meantime replace her in the prison.

Ar. Hear me . . . have pity . . .

Cre. Hence : depart.

SCENE THE SIXTH.

Creon.

Cre. Must I
To my commands, whether they're kind or cruel,
Find all rebellious?—All at last shall yield.

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Antigone, among Guards.

Ant. Let us make better speed ; so slow a step
Ill becomes her, who has, at length, just reach'd
The goal so long desired . . . Perhaps ye, oh guards,
May feel compassion for my fate ? . . . Proceed.
Oh terrible death, I look thee in the face,
And yet I tremble not. Not for myself,
But for Argia, am I troubled thus :
Guards ! is her fate to any of you known ?
Speak, if ye aught can tell ? ye all are silent ?
Argia ! for thy sake alone I weep . . .

SCENE THE SECOND.

Antigone, Argia, among Guards.

Ar. I am then driven from Thebes ? . . . 'Tis true,
I bear,
Beginning and the end of all my hopes,
This urn with me ; . . . but not one last farewell

To my beloved companion!...

Ant. Ah! what voice,

What sobbing voice is that I hear?

Ar. Oh heavens!

Who do I see?

Ant. Argia?

Ar. Dearest sister...

How fortunate this meeting! But, alas!

Thy hands with chains are laden?...

Ant. Tell me quickly!...

Where art thou thus by force compelled to go?

Ar. To Argos, to my sire.

Ant. I breathe again!

Ar. Creon esteems me of so little worth,

That he repeals my sentence: but, alas!...

Ant. Guards, if ye ever knew a shade of pity,

To our last interview do not refuse

A few brief moments. Come to me, my sister;

Why cannot I to this sad bosom clasp thee?

But bound with impious and galling chains

I have no power... yet clasp me to thy bosom.

But what do I behold? What precious burthen

Dost thou, with such a fond anxiety,

Fold to thy breast? An urn? It is... oh heaven!

The ashes of my brother, fatal pledge,

Fatal, and yet inestimably dear;...

Ah, press this sacred relic to my lips.

And is it granted to me, ere I die,

With my warm tears to bathe thee?... oh, my brother,

'Tis more than e'er I hoped;... these tears, the last

That I shall ever shed, are well bestow'd.

This, oh Argia, is a precious gift:

Creon, in granting this, was most indulgent :
Thou should'st be satisfied. Return to Argos ;
Quickly return : to thy despairing father
Carry this urn . . . Live ; for thy son's sake, live ;
And o'er this urn to weep ; and . . . mid . . . thy . . .
tears

Remember still Antigone . . .

Ar. My heart

Thou rendest . . . scarcely can I speak from weeping :
But shall I live while thou art doom'd to death ?

Ant. Yes ; to a death most horrible I go.
The plain, on which we piously perform'd
Last night our sacred rites, is destined now
To be my place of burial ; Creon wills
That, on that plain, I should be buried living.

Ar. Oh impious !

Ant. Because he fears the people,
He has deferr'd till night to execute
Th' atrocious sentence. Ah, restrain thy tears :
Leave me ; depart ; thus will, at last, in me
The race of *Ædipus* be quite extinguish'd.
This I regret not ; may my lingering death
Suffice to expiate the dreadful crimes,
So oft repeated, of my family.

Ar. Ah ! I will share with thee thy punishment ;
Thy courage strengthens mine ; thy pangs, in part,
May perhaps be thus diminished.

Ant. What sayest thou ?
Rather will they be thus a thousand times
More exquisite !

Ar. Together, if we die,
We may, at least, invoke the sacred name
Of *Polinices* ; may exhort each other,

Lastly we may shed tears . . .

Ant. Be silent thou . . .

Do not, I pray thee, make me weep again . . .

To the last test my constancy is brought.

My tears I cannot check unless thou'rt silent . . .

Ar. Alas ! then cannot I, or rescue thee,
Or die with thee ?

Ant. Rather resolve to live.

Thou'rt not the child of *Œdipus* ; thy heart
Is not like mine, with guilty love consumed ;

Of the betrayer, and the murderer,

Of all thy race, thou lovest not the son.

Here is my crime ; I ought alone t' atone for it.

Hæmon, ah still my heart, in all its force,

The passion feels which thou hast planted there,

Feels all the grief to which I leave thee victim.

But let me to my doom. Sister, farewell !

SCENE THE THIRD.

Creon, Antigone, Argia, Guards.

Cre. Why do ye thus delay ? Has she not yet
Reach'd the appointed place of punishment ?

What do I see ? *Argia* ? And with her ? . . .

Who could unite them ? Which of you betray'd me ?

Ant. Thy satellites, less harden'd than thyself,
To me have granted a few transient moments.

By chance we met each other : to my death

I go without delay ; ah, be appeased !

Thou hast perform'd a just and pious deed

In granting thus *Argia's* safe return.

Ar. *Creon*, unite my destiny to hers . . .

Ant. Ah fly, ah fly ; lest he should cease to pity.

Cre. First to her destination drag Argia . . .

Ar. Ah cruel ! will ye tear me thus by force ?

Ant. Give me the last embrace.

Cre. Tear them by force ;

Tear them asunder ; wrest them from each other :
Quickly obey, it is my will.

Ar. Oh heavens !

I ne'er shall see thee more !

Ant. Farewell . . . for ever !

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Creon, Antigone, Guards.

Cre. By the other gate conduct her to the plain . . .
But no—Again immure her in the place
From whence she came. ¹ Ipseus, listen to me.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Creon.

Cre. Thus from the malcontents I have removed
All cause of murmuring. I have well reflected :
Nor should have changed my purpose but for this . . .
By this means all will be conciliated.
The guilty factions of the people rise
From an innate impatience of restraint ;
Yet oft they cloak themselves in feigned compassion,
And evermore with danger is it fraught,
The people's pity, whether true or feign'd ;
And now, so much the more, as now my son,

¹ Whispers in his ear.

By heading them, adds to their hardihood.
 'Tis too, too true, that he who fills the throne
 Vainly believes, or rather feigns belief,
 To cheat his natural imbecility,
 That he can change, or modify at will,
 Human propensities, or that a king
 Gains with his crown a superhuman power.
 That power resides but in the subjects' will ;
 He trembles at it, who makes others tremble.
 But an expert hand, and a subtle head,
 Suffer not others to forestall their schemes :
 One stroke lays low the idol of the people,
 Lays low their hope, their courage, and their strength,
 Not irresistible, because unknown.—
 But, ah ! what noise is this I hear around me ?
 What brandishing of swords do I behold ?
 What do I see ? With arm'd confederates
 Hæmon encircled ? . . . and towards me advancing ?
 Let him advance . . . The moment is well chosen.

SCENE THE SIXTH.

Creon, Hæmon, the Followers of Hæmon.

Cre. Son, what is thy intent ?

Hæm. Call me not son !

I have no father. Of a tyrant king
 I come to abrogate the impious laws :
 But for thyself thou hast no cause for fear ;
 I do not come the avenger of thy crimes :
 That to the gods belongs : to rescue Thebes
 From the detested sight of further crimes
 My right-hand brandishes the naked sword.

Cre. Against thy father, and against thy king,

Thou, thou in arms? The people to seduce
To civil tumult and rebellious discord,
This, surely, is an unexampled means
Of sparing further crimes . . . ungrateful son,
Blind and ungrateful son . . . yet, in despite
Of thy transgressions, to thy father dear!
What dost thou seek? a sceptre premature?

Hæm. Reign and prolong thy days; nothing of
thine

Do I desire: but I demand, and challenge,
And with these valiant followers, with this arm
I shall know how to gain by force my own.
Argia and Antigone I seek
To rescue from thy hands . . .

Cre. What dost thou say?
Oh, foolish and presumptuous hardihood!
Dar'st thou to brandish thy perfidious sword,
Against thy father brandish it, to unloose
The chains of those whose chains are loosed already?
Argia, from imprisonment released,
Is, at this moment, journeying towards Argos;
I send her as a present to her father:
To this, thou seest, the terror of thy sword
Did not erewhile compel me.

Hæm. But, ah say,
What are the fortunes of Antigone?

Cre. She from the horrors of her squalid prison
Is also freed.

Hæm. Where is she? I would see her.

Cre. Is this alone thy wish?

Hæm. On me alone

That now depends: why should I now indeed
Demand her at thy hands? I can, and will,

(Although it is not mine) for a brief while,
Give in this palace law. Brave warriors,
Let us depart; from impious power set free
A royal virgin, to whom aught is due
In this her Thebes, rather than punishment.

Cre. Thy warriors are useless; thou alone
May'st for this task suffice: and who will dare
Thy footsteps to oppose? Ah, enter there,
Take with thee whom thou wilt: I humbly here,
Among thy champions, thy despised father,
Remain, till thou, her valiant avenger,
Return and triumph.

Hæm. Thou in jest, perchance,
Dost speak; I speak in earnest. Creon, see,
See, if my deeds do not make good my words.

Cre. Go.¹ Thou sufficest not to humble Creon.

Hæm. What do I see? . . . oh heavens! . . . Antigone . . .

Infamous tyrant . . . dost thou smite me thus?

Cre. 'Tis thus I humble pride: thus to my laws
Enforce obedience; thus reform my son.

Hæm. Reform me? Ah, I am too much thy son!
Ah, were I not so! in thy bosom² thus.—
I die . . . I die . . .

Cre. My son, what hast thou done?

Hæm. Dost thou inopportunistly pity me? . . .
Carry elsewhere thy pity . . . come not near me . . .

¹ The scene opens, and discovers the dead body of Antigone.

² He springs towards his father with his drawn sword, but on a sudden stops, and, turning it, plunges it into his own bosom.

Do not exasperate my dying pangs . . .
Thus do I yield to thee the blood, 'twere better
Thou ne'er had'st given to me.

Cre. Son, rash son! . . .

I call the gods to witness, I ne'er thought
That an ungovernable passion thus
Would arm thee 'gainst thyself . . .

Hæm. Fly; . . . quit my sight.

And force me not, with my last gasp, to curse thee
With horrid imprecations of despair.

I was . . . to thee a son . . . Thou never wert,
Never . . . to me . . . a father.

Cre. Oh, my son!

Hæm. I leave thee to remorse and bitter anguish.

My friends, my friends, as a last act of kindness,
Drag my expiring body to the spot
Where lies Antigone. It is my wish
That thence my struggling spirit take from earth
Its latest flight . . .

Cre. Oh son . . . too well beloved!

And must I yield thee thus? for ever thus
Remain a childless wretch? . . .

Hæm. Creon, once more,

Or in my bosom plunge the fatal weapon . . .

Or let me to the side of her . . . I love . . .

Be dragg'd . . . and . . . there . . . expire.¹

Cre. Oh son! . . . oh blow,
Fatal and unexpected.²

¹ He is slowly supported by his friends towards the body of Antigone.

² He covers his face, and remains immoveable, until Hæmon is almost out of the sight of the spectators.

SCENE THE SEVENTH.

Creon.

Cre. Thus, thou first
Tremendous retribution of the skies,
For blood unjustly spill'd, art thou accomplish'd!...
I see thee arm'd with terrors: . . . and I tremble.

VIRGINIA.

A TRAGEDY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

APPIUS CLAUDIUS.

VIRGINIA.

VIRGINIUS.

People.

ICILIUS.

Lictors.

MARCUS.

Followers of Icilius.

NUMITORIA.

Slaves of Marcus.

SCENE,—The Forum in ~~Rome~~ *Montreal*

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Numitoria, Virginia.

Nu. What thus delays thee? Come: to our abode
Let us return.

Virginia. Mother, whene'er I pass
This forum, recollections deep and lofty
Delay my progress. It was in this place
That erewhile thunder'd from Icilius' lips
The sentiments of freedom: heard no more:
Absolute power long since has made him mute.
How just are both his anger and his grief!

Nu. To-day, perhaps, to his so many griefs.
May yield some solace, if he truly love thee.

Virginia. To-day?... If he sincerely love me?
... Speak!...

Nu. Virginia, yes : at last thy father hears,
And grants fulfilment to thy fervent wishes :
He from the camp has written, and proposes
Himself to accelerate thy nuptial rites.

Virginia. Is it then true, that, of my lingering hopes,
I gain at last the object ? Dearest mother,
How happy thou hast made me !

Nu. To Virginius,
Not less than to thyself, for a long time
Icilius has been dear : they both are Romans :
And are so more by actions than by name.
It was not ever possible for thee
To fix more loftily thy partial fondness
Than in Icilius' heart : nor did thy father,
Till equal to thy beauty was thy virtue,
Affiance thee to him : he would thou wert
Worthy Icilius, ere Icilius' spouse.

Virginia. And does he think me so to-day ? oh joy
Immense and unexpected ! To obtain
A husband like Icilius, seems to me
The first of every blessing ; yet it is
A far superior blessing to deserve him.

Nu. Thou meritest his hand ; and he alone,
Of all the Roman youth, does merit thine ;
He that dares shew himself a Roman yet,
While Rome debased in guilty silence stands
Astonish'd, and, though plunged in servitude,
Thinks herself free. Ah, were they like to him,
Th' illustrious traitors to the commonwealth,
Who, while with exultation they recount,
Disgrace, the achievements of their ancestors.
Sense, virtue, valour, uncorrupted faith,
Have, in Icilius' bosom, found a home.

Virginia. He is not noble, that for me suffices,
Nor to the tyrants of his country sold :
Hence is he grateful to my unspoil'd heart.
Upon his liberal, enterprising brow,
I see the magnanimity enthroned
That designates a genuine son of Rome.
In these degenerate times, when even they
Who flatter, tremble, his intrepid speech,
His unperturbed heart, his noble rage,
These are the qualities by him possess'd,
Which have enthrall'd the affections of my heart.
Myself plebeian, I dare boast myself
The equal of Icilius; I should weep,
Since I were then to him inferior,
Were I from noble ancestors descended.

Nu. Thou didst imbibe, e'en with thy milk from
me,
A detestation of patrician blood.
Foster that hatred ; 'tis their due, who are,
As prosperous accidents, or adverse, rise,
Now proud, now humble, always infamous.

Virginia. Shall I belie my birth ? Thou know'st
not, mother,
A cause, which that magnanimous contempt
In me redoubles. I will now relate
Some private injuries hitherto concealed.

Nu. Let us meanwhile press forward.

Virginia. Thou shalt hear
To what this beauty, only prized by me,
Since grateful to Icilius, hath exposed me.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Virginia, Numitoria, Marcus, Slaves.

Mar. This is the damsel. Slaves, without delay,
Drag her to my abode : she, like yourselves,
Was born my servant.

Nu. What is it that I hear ?
And who art thou that dar'st to designate
As slave, a Roman lady ?

Mar. Thy deceit
Is known, and vainly wouldst thou rescue her
From her predestined servitude. Her birth
To thee she owes not, neither is it free.
I also am a citizen of Rome ;
I know, and fear, and I observe the laws ;
And from those laws the courage I derive,
That which belongs to me to take by force.

Virginia. I born a slave ? Am I the slave of Marcus ?

Nu. She not my daughter ? Thou perfidious wretch,
Dar'st style thyself a Roman citizen ?
From thy flagitious actions, and thy words,
I take thee for a satellite of those
Who now oppress their country, and of these
The most degraded. But whoe'er thou art,
Learn that we are plebeians, of a race
Unsullied ; that all violence and fraud
From infamous patricians, and their clients,
May be expected here : and, further learn,
That of this maid Virginius is the father,
And I the spouse of that Virginius ;
That for his native Rome, now in the camp
He toils in arms ; that he may well suffice

To disconcert thy impious hardihood. . .

Mar. And that, deceived by thee, he deems this virgin,

Purchased illegally, to be his child :
Nor hath he known, nor knows, the art by which
Thou hast imposed on him a child not his.
But thou shalt hear me, in a fitting place,
Proofs irrefragable of this adduce.
Meanwhile my slave shall be reclaim'd by me.
I am no liar, nor Virginius fear :
Beneath the sacred guardianship I stand
Securely, of inviolable laws.

Virginia. Mother, and shall I lose thee, and with thee,

My sire, my husband, and my liberty ?

Nu. I call to witness Rome, and all her gods,
She is my daughter.

Mar. Thou in vain dost swear ;
In vain defiest me. Without delay
My slaves she follows ; or, compell'd by force,
She shall go hence. If so thou wilt, hereafter,
Before an uncorrupt, supreme tribunal,
To give an ample reason, I am ready
For what I've done.

Nu. Thou deem'st thyself more strong
Than powerless women ; hence thy hardihood :
But with impunity thou shalt not now
Adopt coercive measures. Ill, I warn thee,
Ill chosen is the scene for infamy :
This is the Roman forum ; know'st it not ?
Retire ; the multitude will flock together
At our laments : of virgin innocence
Avengers rise by thousands and by thousands.

Virginia. If no avenger should espouse my cause,
Blood-hounds, you should be forced to slay me here
Rather than drag me as a slave. I am,
I feel, the daughter of a lofty sire :
I feel my Roman and my free-born heart
Bound high within my breast. Far different,
Far different were that heart, if sprung from one
Vile like thyself, I were a viler slave.

Mar. Quickly shalt thou resume thy servile
thoughts
Amid thy native fetters ; by one stroke
Thy fate, and thy deportment, shall be changed.
Meanwhile, in contests frivolous and vain,
The hours pass on.

Nu. Together with my daughter
I would be led.

Virginia. No violence shall tear me,
Oh mother, from thy side.

Mar. Vain is the struggle.
From her false mother, wrest by violence
The fugitive slave.

Virginia. If there be pity in you,
Rescue me, valiant Romans.

Nu. Generous sons
Of Mars ! this virgin, whom I clasp so fondly
To my maternal breast, was born, like you,
Free and a Roman : shall these impious slaves
Tear her from me by force ? before your eyes ?
E'en in the midst of Rome ? and in the presence
Of our most sacred temples ?

SCENE THE THIRD.

Icilius, People, Numitoria, Virginia, Marcus.

Ici. What disturbance ?

What screams ? oh, heaven ! what is it that I see ?
Virginia !

Virginia. Defend me . . .

Nu. Heaven has sent thee ;

Run ; fly ; with danger imminent thy spouse
Is threatened.

Virginia. I am torn from thee, my mother,
And from myself. That man has vilified
Me with the name of Slave.

Ici. Of slave ? oh vile !

Are these thy noble enterprises ? Thou,
Art thou more skill'd to combat in the forum
Than in the camp ? Oh ! of all slaves the worst,
Dar'st thou to stain this maid with servitude ?

Mar. Icilius, thou accustomed to debates,
Fostered in discord and fierce turbulence,
It well becomes thee, that, to awaken tumults,
The food congenial to thy wrathful nature,
Thou shouldst assign this frivolous pretence.
But since, in spite of thee, there are at Rome
Most sacred laws, what cause have I to fear thee ?
She is my slave ; yes, she ; once more I say it ;
And I, to whom it most imports to prove it,
Will prove her to be so. Nor thou, I deem,
Nor those, like thee, whose contumacious scowl
Bespeaks their factious nature, are my judges.

Ici. Icilius, and a few like him, here stand
Tremendous advocates of innocence.

Ye that are Romans, listen to my words.
I, who have never forfeited my oath ;
I, who have ne'er betray'd or sold my honour ;
Who equally exult that I possess
Ignoble parents, and a noble heart ;
Listen to me ; to you I speak. This virgin,
Free-born and innocent, is Virginius' daughter . . .
At the mere mention of that name, I see
A noble indignation in your eyes.
For you Virginius combats in the camp :
Oh see on what degenerate times we have fallen !
Meanwhile, exposed to shame, exposed to outrage,
His child remains in Rome. Who is the culprit ?
Come forward, Marcus ; shew thyself . . . But what ?
Thou tremblest ? . . . Look at him, ye know him well ;
Chief minister, and vilest satellite,
Of Appius, the arch-tyrant of our times ;
Of Appius, mortal foe of every virtue ;
Of Appius, the oppressor, harden'd, proud,
Ferocious ; who your freedom has destroy'd ;
And, to increase the insult, spares your lives.
To me Virginia was betroth'd ; I love her.
Who I, that thus address you, am, I think
'Tis needless to remind you : I was once
Your tribune, your defender once . . . in vain :
For rather did ye trust the blandishments
Of flattering words, than my sincere reproofs :
We now receive for this our punishment,
Our common servitude . . . Words here are useless.
Well as ye know his name, the arm, the heart,
The hardihood of Icilius ye know.
Free, at your hands, do I demand my spouse.
He asks her not of you ; calls her his slave,

Seizes her person, drags her on by force.
Which is the liar, Marcus or Icilius ?
Give sentence, thou, people of mighty Rome.

Mar. Those laws, oh sovereign people, which ye
framed,

Tremendous, wise, and sacred, dare ye be
The first now to infringe ? No ; for the gods
Of Rome will not permit it. On my head,
Then, may the weight of your resentment fall
When I am convicted as an unjust claimant :
But while that vain boasts, and atrocious insults,
And horrible contemptuousness evinced
Towards supreme, legitimated power,
Are the sole arms by which I am opposed,
Say, which of you will venture from her lord
To force his rightful slave ?

Ici. I first ; and I
Shall have as many comrades to this deed,
As there are Romans here. Thy fraudulent claim,
Doubtless, some impious mystery conceals :
Now, by what reason thou art thus impelled
Who knows ? who can, who would, know it ? not I ;
I only, that the infamous effect
Shall not ensue. Rome, since she fell a prey
To the detested ten, under pretence
Of law, enough already hath endured
From force, from shame, from slaughter. Hitherto
I am not used to outrage : who endures,
Deserves it. Never can she be a slave
Who is affianced to Icilius ; . . . never,
E'en were she born a slave. Was ever law
Like this unjust ? Slaves in the very lap
Of liberty ? And slaves to whom ? . . . To what ? . . .

To the insulting pride of our oppressors.
Slaves are not for the people ; not for us ;
Who have both hearts and hands. But let this Rome
Have slaves by thousands, and by tens of thousands,
So that Virginia be not of the number.
Romans, meanwhile believe me : I affirm
She is the daughter of Virginius :
Her modest gestures, and her face declare it ;
Her lofty feelings, and her ripened sense.
I love her ; she is destined to be mine ;
Shall I thus lose her ?

People. Miserable husband !

And who can tell who instigates this man ?

Ici. Oh ! I perceive ye feel compassion for me ;
And I deserve it ; on the very day
When I believed that I, of all my hopes,
Had gain'd the summit, see, I am at once
Plunged in the lowest depths of misery.
I have abundant enemies in Rome ;
And all your enemies ; powerful enough,
But still more cunning. Who can tell ? Perchance,
First having robbed me of my liberty,
They now would rob me of my wife. Behold
Their hardihood ! Fables they first invent ;
And this man comes to give their lies a substance . . .
Ah, native Rome ! to what art thou condemned ? . . .
Flagitious nobles, you are here the slaves :
Ye should be laden with opprobrious fetters ;
Ye, in whose bosoms, fraud and cowardice,
Avarice, ambition, find a fit abode ;
Ye who by envy are for ever gnawed,
Malice, and jealousy, and rancorous hate,
At our plebeian virtues, by yourselves

Not only never practised, but unknown.
Ye persecutors, clench our galling chains,
And doubly captivate the multitude :
The impious slavery, the woes of all,
Rather would they behold, than share with us
The sweets of liberty : by nature cruel,
To them our joy is grief, our grief a joy.
But that the times will change, I hope ; and may
The day for this be near.

People. Oh, were it so !
But . . .

Mar. Cease ; no more : wouldst thou, perhaps,
again
Create thyself a tribune of the people ?
Blood and sedition, more than aught, I know
Are grateful to thy nature ; but may Heaven
Forbid to-day that I should be to thee
The means of such calamitous effects.
Practise on these, and artfully infuse
Thy poisonous influence ; to its virulence
No other remedy will I oppose
Than what the laws provide. I summon you,
Virginia I summon ; and, with her,
Her falsely seeming mother, to appear
At the tribunal before Appius :
There not fierce turbulence, and frantic howlings,
But tranquil reason will decide our cause.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Icilius, Virginia, Numitoria, People.

Ici. To the tribunal I myself will lead her.
Romans (I now address the few, the free,

And the courageous) you, I hope, will be
Of this great cause spectators : I invite you :
Our final litigation this will be.
Hence will each husband, and each father learn,
If he a wife or daughter have in Rome.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Icilius, Numitoria, Virginia.

Nu. Disastrous times ! Days for degenerate deeds !
Oh, wretched mothers ! . . .

Virginia. In thine eyes, oh spouse,
But for my father I had had no value.
Now I am bereft of him, how shall I dare
Proclaim myself thy wife ?

Ici. Thou shalt be ever
Virginus' daughter, and Icilius' wife,
And, which is more, I swear to thee, a Roman.
To be the faithful partner of my fate
Thee have I chosen ; equal to myself
In virtue I esteem thee. To my lips
Phrases more soft than this love dictates not ;
My arms, my heart, if need there be, will give
Proofs more conclusive of my tenderness.
But can ye guess the motive that impels
That miscreant thus to insult thee ?

Virginia. Say'st thou not
He is the creature of the tyrant Appius ?

Ici. The servile tool of all his inclinations.

Virginia. The reason then is too well known to me.
For a long time, with a flagitious love,
Has Appius burned for me . . .

Ici. What do I hear ?

Oh insolence ! . . .

Nu. We then are lost. Oh heavens !

Ici. I live ; and I have yet a sword. Fear not,
Oh ladies, fear not while Icilius breathes.

Virginia. Listen, and shudder at his guilty boldness.

Oft has he tried to practise on my virtue
By circumvention, or seductive arts.
Menaces, promises, prayers, flatteries, gifts,
Whate'er is deem'd the price of chastity
To base patricians, he to me has offered.
Th' insufferable, and atrocious insult
I long dissembled : in the distant camp
My sire was stationed ; and in vain, from me,
Alone, and powerless, had my mother heard it.
But now my lot assumes a different aspect :
I am thy wife, I am no longer silent.
Oh thou, the noblest of the Romans, thine
Not only is th' offence, but thine the vengeance.
Rivers of tears I silently have shed ;
My tender mother often wept with me,
Pitying my grief, though ignorant of its cause.
Behold the horrid secret. Appius adds
Fraud now, and violence, to his former arts ;
He is at once the plaintiff and the judge :
I shall be taken from thee, ere I can
Be thine : ah grant, at least, that he obtain me
No otherwise than dead !

Ici. Ere thou be his,
Or ere he shed thy blood, shall Rome behold
Herself with blood inundated : my blood,
And that of every hero, shall be spill'd.
To those who fear not death, and who is Appius,

But one, and one the lowest of mankind ?

Nu. Appius, alas ! too much surpasses thee
In artifice.

Ici. Though cruel and unjust,
Appius has hitherto at least preserved
The exterior of equity ; all Rome
Will be assembled at th' important cause :
We need not yet despair. We stand in need
Of fortitude and judgment : above all
The father here is indispensable.
The camp is not far distant ; it shall be
My first solicitude to reconduct
Him here without delay. Let us go hence ;
Meanwhile, to your abode I am your guide.
A solace to you, ladies, sad, 'tis true,
But yet the only one that I can now
Propose to you, be the assured conviction,
That, if a path to justice is not opened,
Our swords, I swear, shall open one to vengeance.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Appius.

Ap. What is this, Appius ? Thou with frantic love
Inflamed ? . . . With thy high projects for a throne
Dar'st thou to mingle an ignoble fondness
For a plebeian damsel ? . . . Yes ; since she
Presumes to turn a deaf ear to my prayers,
It now becomes a necessary step
To power supreme, to make her yield to force.
But yet the people . . . why should they alarm me ?

Beyond all credence are the foolish people
Affrighted at the laws : If I beneath
The shelter of those laws to such a pitch
Have risen, to-day they surely may defend me ;
First to create, and then abolish them,
Or bend them to my purpose, I have both
The power and skill. Much art it will require
To consummate my scheme of power ; but less
Than I possess. 'Twas easier far to me,
Haughty patricians, to make tools of you,
Whose only passion is a lust of gold,
And sooner gold itself would be exhausted,
Than in yourselves the avaricious thirst :
With this I've gorged ye, though not sated yet ;
And, for the present, instruments I've made you
For the destruction of the multitude :
For your annihilation afterwards
The day will come ; a light task this will be
To him who has bought, oppress'd, degraded you.—
But see, Virginia comes to the tribunal ;
With her, her mother and Icilius are,
And a vast multitude ! A haughty train ;
And perhaps a fearful one to any man
That were not Appius ; but the man who feels
Within himself that he is born to reign,
Whose will is fixed on empire, or on death,
Can neither change his purposes, nor fear.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Appius, Icilius, Virginia, Numitoria; People, Lictors.

Ap. What shouts are these I hear ? and dare ye
thus

Approach the sacred decemviral throne ?

People. Rome asks for justice from thee.

Ap. And I ask

Respect and homage from the Roman people.

Not less to check all popular misrule,

Than for the safety of the people, here,

With me, Astræa sits : it seems to me

That these tremendous symbols of my office,

With which I am surrounded, silently

Remind you of this truth. Do ye so soon

Forget the sovereign power ye gave to me ?

Say, is not Rome's collected majesty

By you to me transferr'd ? Be pleased, I pray ye,

To be respectful to yourselves in me.

Nu. Appius, thine eyes behold a wretched mother,
Whose only daughter a base miscreant

Would tear from her embrace ; my true-born child,

Nourished by me, who in my sight grew up,

The object of her father's love and mine.

There are who dare asperse her with the name

Of Slave, who seek, by force, to seize her person,

To tear her from my arms. Th' unheard-of outrage

Fills Rome with horror, makes it tremble, shudder,

And drives me to distraction . . . Here she is :

This is the virgin ; this my only hope :

Great is her beauty, but her virtue greater.

Rome knows our manners and our characters :

There's nothing in us that resembles slavery.

A most tremendous question by my means

To-day will be decided : in the name

Of universal Rome I ask it of thee,

Are, or are not, our sons and daughters ours ?

Ap. A mother's vehemence in thee I pardon.

To thee I make reply ; and, with thyself,
To universal Rome. Where there are laws,
He need not fear who has not broken them.
To tear from thee thy child, if she be thine,
Would be a vain attempt. Within my heart
Exists no motive to a partial verdict.
Before this high tribunal, hitherto,
No man appears proclaiming her a slave.
But ye, who are ye ? be he true, or false,
Who is the imputed father of this damsel ?

Nu. Appius, and art thou ignorant ? Behold her :
Virginia is her name ; a name derived
From one her father, to thyself and Rome
Well known ; known better only to her foes.
Of race plebeian are we, and herein
Do we exult : free was my daughter born,
Free shall she die. Of her unblemished birth
It may be held by thee no doubtful proof,
That of Icilius she's the chosen bride.

Ici. Know, more than this, that to Icilius she
Is dearer far than life, and dear as freedom.

Ap. 'Tis now my wish alone to know if she
Be free, or not, by birth. Being to thee
Dear, and affianced, cannot change her lot.
Thy scowling aspect, thy ferocious words,
Imbued with bitterness, what can they do ?
Icilius and Rome shall quickly hear me,
Whate'er she be, her destiny adjudge.

SCENE THE THIRD.

*Marcus, Appius, Virginia, Numitoria, Icilius,
People, Lictors.*

Mar. As it behoves a citizen, I come
Before thy eminent tribunal, Appius ;
Few are there in my train ; the crowd immense,
Encompassing my adversaries here,
Excites no terror in my steady heart.
I adduce proofs and arguments ; not cries,
And force, and weapons. Appius nothing hears
Except the right ; and of my right it is
No trifling proof, that these have first infringed
All legal usage, and have, ere I spake,
Sought to invalidate an unmade claim.

Ap. True ; this proceeding is unprecedented.

Ici. But let us hear : do thou now state thy cause.

Mar. That damsel, named from her pretended
father,

Was, from a slave of mine, born in my house.
Hence, while an infant, by maternal fraud
Withdrawn from me, and for a certain price
To Numitoria sold, who cherished her,
Instead of one, who, dying, left her childless.
Virginius was the first caught by the fraud ;
Hence he believed her, and believes her still,
To be his daughter. I have hither brought,
And they alone escort me to this place,
Persons who witnessed both the time, the manner,
The price of this transaction. They are ready
To ratify my statement with their oaths.

Nu. Liars are always most disposed to swear.

Should what a Roman mother dares t' assert,
 (Yes, Roman and plebeian) less be trusted
 Than the vile evidence of those who make
 An infamous traffic of their perjuries?
 At least, before these swear that which is not,
 For a few moments hear a mother speak.
 From my emotion, from my grief, my words,
 And from my gestures, let the people judge
 Whether or not I am the real mother.

Ap. I here should judge, and all the rest be silent.
And those especially, who, of revenge,
Of love, or anger, instruments alike,
And foes alone of reason, make themselves
Of all these passions partizans in turn.
These hitherto, too frequently in Rome,
Justice have interrupted or destroyed.

Ici. Say, is it just to silence evidence?
That which to no man is forbidden, thou
Forbiddest to a mother?

Ap. Thou wilt, perhaps,
Teach me to judge because thou wert a tribune?
A private individual, like thyself,
I too might feel compassion at the names
Of mother and of daughter. As a judge,
I must withstand these passionate appeals.
Nor is it fitting that I should to tears,
Or threats, here yield attention, but alone
To Reason's voice. The claimant's proofs first heard,
Then should I hear the feigned or real mother.
This is the course of law . . . but in the laws
Ye place not now your confidence; I see it.

Ici. Should we for ever hear the name of law,
Now that the will of few is absolute?

But since who breaks the law dares to adduce it,
I also will adduce its usages,
And say, that 'tis not lawful here to judge
The daughter, in the absence of the father.

People. Thou speakest well : the father should be present.

Mar. The father, as erewhile I mentioned to you,
Was never conscious of the mother's fraud.

Ici. But I of yours am conscious ; and if thou
Dost not from thy vile enterprise desist,
All Rome shall hear me, with a thundering voice,
Quickly divulge your impious machinations.

Ap. Icilius, be silent. What dost hope ?
In whom dost trust ? In the seditious murmurs
Of a few factious miscreants, who applaud
Thy turbulent harangues ? Oh fool, oh fool,
How much art thou deceived ! I on myself
Alone repose ; the love, e'en as the hate,
Of those who call themselves thy partizans,
Is ineffectual and precarious.
The people, not the Icili, I esteem ;
Their prating moves me not, their rage I fear not ;
And their offensive flatteries I despise.

Ici. 'Tis well to scoff at those who must obey.
But on the day, when thou, throughout this Rome,
Intreated'st our vain suffrages ; the day
When thou from pride affected'st to be humble ;
Magnanimous from baseness ; incorrupt,
And just, and pious, from impiety ;
That day, in somewhat less audacious terms,
We heard thee speak. To all of us, thou now,
Appius, art known : thou hast made too much haste,
Made haste incautiously, to reassume

Thy real character ; in all respects
Thou of a tyrant hast the attributes,
And, except prudence, all a tyrant's virtues :
Yet prudence, to all virtues paramount,
Was always held by men resembling thee,
The key-stone to the arch of tyranny.

People. He speaks imprudently, but speaks the truth.

Ap. I thought to-day, to pass a sentence here
Upon a slave ; but now I clearly see
That I must first pass sentence on a rebel.

Ici. I here expected to defend alone
The free birth of a maid to me betrothed :
My rights, the rights of Rome, the rights of all
My fellow citizens, how blest were I
If I were able to defend to-day,
E'en at the expense of my last drop of blood.

People. Oh, spirit-stirring words ! oh noble heart !
He is a Roman.

Ap. Lictors, stand around him :
O'er his audacious head suspend your hatchets,
And at the least attempt . . .

Virginia. It shall not be,
Oh Heaven, no never ! I will be his shield :
Direct to me your hatchets : let thy lictors
Drag me away a slave : my servitude
Is a small evil, and my death is none,
Provided that this hero be unhurt,
Rome's last remaining champion.

Ap. From his side
Tear her away. A most portentous plot
Lies here conceal'd, and threatens Rome with danger.

Ici. This is a dagger for herself and me,
If we are attack'd by force: no man shall dare,
While I have life, t' approach us.

People. He fears nothing.

Ici. Thou shalt be forced to kill me, ere this virgin
Can from this spot be dragg'd. Ah, Romans, learn
The terrible contrivance here conceal'd:
Learn with what instant danger Rome is threaten'd:
And then let me be slain before your eyes.
This Appius burns with infamous desires
For my Virginia.

People. He defies all fear.

Ici. Tried to seduce her; menaces and prayers
He used . . . and sought at last with gold to bribe her:
The extremest outrage that to abject virtue,
Vice, when enthroned, dare offer. But her blood
Was not patrician, thence above all price.
Now he attempts to seize on her by force;
And 'tis enough to certify the fraud
To know the claimant's name: now for your children
Tremble, oh fathers; for your wives still more
Tremble, oh husbands. Now, what more remains
That we can lose? Our ill-defended lives?
But what is life, where honour and our children,
Our country, and the heart that makes it dear,
Our liberty, our laws, are taken from us?

People. For us, and for our children, liberty
Or death.

Ap. This is a lie . . .

People. Or liberty
Or death.

Nu. Suspend awhile thy vehemence,
Oh generous people. Ah! may Heaven avert

That one, from me sprung, be the fatal cause
Of shedding rivers of pure Roman blood.
I ask alone, and in your name I ask it,
That in this cause Virginius may be heard.
From the insufferable, false aspersion,
E'en in his presence, and before you all,
If time be granted, I shall clear myself.

Ap. Cease, cease your importunities, or I,
The stern executor of the law, will shew
That law in all its fiercest majesty.
You rouse yourselves in vain to a vain task ;
There is no need of your audacious cries ;
They are as useless justice to obtain,
As they are impotent to baffle it.
Icilius lies, and I will prove it. He,
Of every faction, every broil the head,
Long has he panted to shed civil blood.
He was your enemy, as he was ours,
When he was tribune. To destroy the senate,
Deceive the people, to vile servitude
Reduce us all, was his flagitious aim :
Hence towards us is his rage. It was your will
To yield to decemviral hands the reins
Of this most desolate and afflicted city :
Weary yourselves of impious fatal discord,
Ye made me what I am. Returning peace,
So ardently desired, scarce lifts her head,
And at a nod, a word, of him, the worst,
The basest of the citizens of Rome,
Shall I behold you eager for fresh tumults ?

People. 'Tis true ; he is our judge : but let us hear
The answer of Icilius.

Ici. 'Tis true ;

A legislator and a judge ye made him ;
But for a year ; already long ago
His annual jurisdiction has expired ;
And since that period he hath made himself,
By artifice, your judge, by force, your tyrant.
Peace, universal servitude he calls :
This is not peace, but a deep sleep of death.
The blood of our best citizens in streams
Runs in the camp : who, think ye, drinks that blood ?
Our enemies perchance ? The valiant Siccus,
He who dared in the camp invoke the name
Of ancient liberty, did he not fall
In a pretended contest, in the back,
By an insidious decemviral knife,
Transfix'd ?

Ap. The rebel Siccus presumed . . .

Ici. Why should I speak of murders ? They are
known.

Blood they have not as yet diffused in Rome,
But gold with lavish hand, which afterwards
Will be the horrible price of human blood.
He is accounted now a foe of Rome,
Who, as a Roman should, both speaks and thinks,
The virgins see themselves unjustly robb'd
Of husbands, parents, liberty, and fame.
What do ye now expect ? The horrible yoke,
Far worse than any death, upon yourselves
By yourselves fasten'd ; which scarce leaves to you
Man's character, or prostituted name,
Why falls it not to earth by you destroy'd ?
Say, are ye Romans ? your professions still
Are worthy of the name, but not your deeds.
Say, is there need of blood to goad you on ?

Already in the tyrant's countenance
I read th' inflexible decree of death.
Ye satellites of blood, be expeditious,
Why do your weapons slumber? Appius, this,
This is the head, which, sever'd from my body,
The liberty of Rome shall take away,
Or ratify for ever. Appius, tremble
While it remains there; thou shalt ever hear it
Proclaiming vengeance, liberty, and arms.
If Rome contain no Roman but myself,
A second Brutus to a second Tarquin,
Living or dead, am I. Behold, I fly not;
I neither flinch nor tremble: here am I....

Virginia. Oh heavens! oh, Appius, mitigate thy
rage:

Shed not his life-blood with your axes: hear;
The people shudder, nor will they permit it.
Thou menacest a life of too much value:
Ah, take my life, the injury to thyself,
To Rome, will then be less...

Ici. What art thou doing?

Dost thou entreat? Entreat an Appius?
And in the presence of myself and Rome?
If thou dost love me, learn to banish fear:
And if I here, as a first pledge of love,
Should offer thee my life; do thou receive it
As is befitting for a Roman lady,
Freeborn, and to Icilius betroth'd.

Nu. Oh dreadful moment! Appius, I pray thee
Yet once, once more; summon Virginius hither;
Let him be waited for, let him be heard.

People. Appius, ah let Virginius be summon'd;
We all desire it...

Ap. And I more than all:
I wish him present here ; so shall he be :
I, in the forum, by to-morrow's dawn,
Expect to meet you all. Although by law
His life is forfeited, I do not now
Condemn Icilius ; ye might suspect
That he alarm'd me : for the present then
Be his life spared, and at the mighty question
Let him assist ; if so he will, in arms ;
And ye with him in arms. Ye first shall hear me
Pass sentence on the slave, and then on him.
To see this I invite you here ; secure
In his own virtue, Appius trembles not.

Mar. But the law wills, that meanwhile in my care
The dubious slave remain.

Ici. The vile abode
Of a bribed satellite, shall that e'er be
Th' asylum of a virtuous virgin ? . . . Never !
There is no law iniquitous like this ;
Or if there be, let it at once be broken.

Mar. Who meanwhile will be surety for this dam-
sel ?

People. All, all : we pledge ourselves.

Ici. And I with them :

Let us depart. To-morrow's rising sun
Shall witness all of us assembled here,
Sure of ourselves and of our wives, or dead.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Appius, Marcus.

Ap. She loves Icilius ? and she is his spouse ?
Hence more inflexibly in my design
And more immutably, shall I persist.

Go, headstrong rebel, go, now in the people
Trust, while I

Mar. Appius, didst thou ever see
The people more inflamed, or more disposed
To insurrection ?

Ap. Nothing did I see
Except Virginia ; and she shall be mine.
Thou perhaps would'st tell me that I ought to fear ?
Dar'st thou say this to Appius ? Did he,
Who fear'd the people, ever govern them ?
With their first impulses to temporize ;
Their second to anticipate ; to wear
An aspect of perpetual defiance ;
Subtly with haughty threat'nings to mix
Seductive flatteries : these are the chief arts
By which I am now what I am ; and here
Greater than any man ere was before
Shall make myself.

Mar. So long as lives Icilius,
In vain thou threaten'st or seducest them.
In him, and in his ardent eloquence,
His boldness as a tribune, they discover,
Their ancient rights recalling, powerful fuel
To feed again an unextinguish'd flame,
Which now breaks forth in enterprizing breasts.

Ap. While there remains aught else for me to do,
Icilius shall live. 'Tis oftentimes
Not profitless to make parade of mercy :
Yes, let him live ; and let the people see,
How little he can thwart the schemes of Appius.
Thou shalt behold that fickle people change
Its timid love to hatred and contempt,
And turn their weapons to Icilius' ruin.

Virginia
Appius
Icilius

Yes, thou shalt see that very populace
Made instrumental to his punishment.

Mar. But ah, what courage to the multitude,
What strength to Icilius, will not the return
Of this Virginus bring?

Ap. But the return
Of this Virginus, Marcus, dost expect it?
Come and behold, how, having once gain'd time,
Appius to use it well, wants not the skill.

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Virginus.

Virginus. At last I am arrived: and with what
speed?

It seem'd as if the pity of a father,
Fear, hope, and love, had wing'd my very feet.
My fears increase as I approach my dwelling.
'Tis almost night: I hasten to embrace,
If I possess her yet, my only daughter,
The only comfort of my weary age.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Icilius, Virginus.

Ici. Oh! . . . whom do I behold? . . . Virginus?
The gods of Rome have sent thee to our aid.
Methinks thy coming here so rapidly
Is an auspicious omen.

Virginus. From the camp
I fled, Icilius! Do I come in time?

I scarcely dare to ask it, am I yet
A father?

Ici. Hitherto thy daughter lives
Unhurt, and free.

Virginius. Oh, unexpected joy!
Beloved daughter! then I breathe at last...

Ici. Thou hast a daughter, but in tears she lives
With her afflicted mother. They exist
Trembling, of their approaching destiny
In horrible suspense: alternately
They, in their anxious bosoms, wish and fear
The moment of thy coming.

Virginius. Oh ye gods!
Then ye have listen'd to my fervent prayers;
Ye that have lent to my exhausted frame
An unaccustom'd strength, by means of which
I have arrived in time to save my daughter,
Or for her to expire.—

Ici. I also will
Save, or die for her. But thou art a father;
Thou hast a weapon not on me bestow'd,
And with the people much may it prevail—
Paternal tears.

Virginius. But say, of our affairs
What is the posture now?

Ici. The self-same spot
Where now thou standest, was, this very morn,
The scene of this iniquitous transaction.
Here first we breathed defiance. Marcus spake,
And, with a thousand subterfuges, strove
To hide the cruel lust of Appius.
Whate'er was needful to delude the people
All was resorted to: bribed witnesses,

Claimants, and laws, and precedents, and proofs.
Already, in himself, the impious judge
Thought, without obstacle, to pass the sentence.
I dared the first to manifest the fraud,
And for Virginia claim'd her father's presence.
With what a terrible shout the people rent
Heaven's echoing concave when they heard thy
name !

An unperturbed deportment he assumed ;
But in his heart, and in his every vein,
Trembled the impious judge. At length he paused,
And promised to await thee. Now I fear'd,
That thy return to intercept, the wretch
Might plant an ambush'd train ; and thus, at last,
That to thy daughter, to myself, and Rome,
Thou mightst be ever lost... At last thou'rt come,
And not in vain, the gods thy safety will'd.
He hath assign'd the sixth hour of to-day
For the vile sentence : let the rising sun,
Among the multitude, a trembling father,
See thee then mix'd, soliciting with tears
Thy genuine offspring. Nor do thou elsewhere,
Save in the people's hearts, for pity seek.
The people only to the father can
Restore his daughter, to myself my wife,
To herself honour, liberty to Rome.

Virginus. Thou know'st, Icilius, how much I love
thee...

My choice of thee to be my son proves this.
Within my unspoil'd heart there yet remain
Three objects of pre-eminent regard :
Rome, my own kindred, and thy rectitude.
I pledge myself, if need there be, to brave

With thee each peril, each high enterprise . . .
But thy impetuous hardihood, thy soul
Magnanimously prodigal of life . . .

Ici. Can virtue then be carried to excess?

Virginus. Yes, when 'tis vain ; when it betrays to
ruin

Him who possesses it, and profits not
Him who doth not possess it. I hear thee,
Icilius, with a noble rage inflamed,
Thy oppress'd country, and my injured daughter,
In one confound.

Ici. And should they be disjoin'd ?
The cause is one : thou art thyself a father,
And dost not thou feel this ? or Rome is Rome,
Then thou hast there a daughter ; I have there
Life and a consort ; or Rome is not Rome,
Then we have nothing there except a sword.

Virginus. But too emphatically now indeed
Is Rome enslaved : I fear for her through thee ;
For every present shock exacerbates
Her deep and dangerous wounds. I fear lest thou,
'Mid different measures, as the most secure,
Shouldst chuse the most tremendous. Ah, could we,
At once, my daughter rescue, nor disturb
The safety of my country . . .

Ici. Hold thy peace :
What name dar'st thou pronounce ? Is there a coun-
try,
Where only one rules, and where all obey him ?
Penates, children, honour, country, freedom,
Once precious names, ah, ill do ye become
The mouths of those who are, like us, enslaved,
While that one breathes that makes us all his prey.

Now slaughter, rapine, violence, and shame,
Are inconsiderable evils ; worse,
A far worse evil is the palsying fear
That weighs upon the universal heart.—
Scarce dare the anxious and mistrustful people
Look at each other, much less converse hold :
So deep is their suspicion and their dread,
Brother fears brother, parents fear their children ;
The base are bribed, the good are overwhelm'd,
The weak neglected, and the valiant slain,
And all degraded : see what are become
Those once proud citizens of Rome, of yore
The terror, now the scorn of Italy.

fear

Virginius. Thy words are true, and from mine eyes
they draw

Not only tears of sorrow, but of rage. . .
But what, 'mid such a multitude of slaves,
Can two alone perform ?

Ici. Avenge their country,
Then die like men.

Virginius. The recent tyranny
Is not establish'd yet : we may attempt,
But never can we consummate revenge.
What cruelties, e'en in the very camp,
Dare not the decemviri perpetrate?
But yet the choicest of our warriors,
Who there are station'd, arm'd, what do they do?
They shudder, and they act not. I desire
The lying allegations to confute,
And save my daughter from the claws of Appius.
If it be indispensable, I am
Most willing, and I ought to die : not so
For thee ; if thou wert dead, who then remains

To rescue Rome, or to avenge us?

Ici. We:...

Living by arms, or by example dead.

More cannot be endured: we have adherents;

Though all may be enslaved, all are not slaves:

The daring of the many stands in need

Of one to dare the first; that one am I.

This is the field in which we're called to fight;

Here let us seek for honour or for death.

In following longer our oppressor's banners,

Thou wilt but purchase to thyself disgrace:

Our foes are in the heart of Rome; in Rome

Then let us combat; and although th' event

Be deem'd precarious, certain is its glory.—

Need I say more to thee?

Virginius. No: I am always

Prepared to die; and now I only grieve

To have lived too long. I hope my passionate cries,

And my conclusive reasons, will avail

To check e'en Appius. Rome, meanwhile, shall see
me

Through all the streets, displaying to the people

My bosom full of honourable scars:

And Rome I will adjure, and all her gods;

Adjure the blood which in her cause I've spill'd,

Both of my own and of her enemies.

Trembling and hoary, in a squalid garb,

To every father I will tell the tale

Of my misfortunes: finally, by me,

Each warrior shall learn the recompence

That Rome awards to those who fight her battles.—

This, this I swear to do... But oh, to stain

My sword with civil blood, and to involve
So many innocents in my hard lot,
Involve in vain. . .

Ici. Yet, perhaps, thou wilt be forced
To do e'en this : our children, liberty,
Deserve, methinks, that we should shed the blood
Of more than of one citizen. If they
Die valiantly, they are too good for slaves;
If cowardly, they merit not to live.
But let us now press forward, to embrace
Thy desolate wife and daughter. Sure I am,
That thou, from their affliction, wilt derive
A fury great as, greater far than, mine;
And that in thee a comrade I shall find,
Whatever be the enterprize.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Numitoria, Virginia, Icilius, Virginius.

Nu. Oh sight ! . . .
If I see well . . . No, I am not deceived ;
'Tis he, 'tis he : oh joy ! Virginius !

Virginia. Father !

Virginius. Oh heaven ! . . . Daughter, . . . is it thus ?
Consort ! . . . I clasp you to my bosom ? Ah !
I feel myself o'ercome . . .

Virginia. Yes, I embrace thee,
Since I am allowed to call thee father.

Nu. Anxious for thee, and doubtful of thy coming,
A longer tarriance here was death to us ;
Hence we set out, impatient till we met thee . . .

Virginia. Trembling and apprehensive . . . Now
at least

Distant from thee I shall not breathe my last.
I fear'd that I should never more behold thee.

Ici. Afflicted father! he can scarcely breathe,
Much less address you.

Nu. Ah, how different now
Is thy return to what it was before,
When from the camp thou cam'st so many a time
The conqueror of our foes? Bent to the earth,
Now I behold, alas, thy honour'd brow,
Erewhile with laurels, now with grief weigh'd down,
And black and fatal thoughts: thou art reduced
To such extremity, that thou dost wish
Thou never hadst had either wife or daughter;
Though formerly, alas, the much-loved objects,
For whom thy glory and thy life were dear.

Virginus. Ladies, to be a husband and a father,
I ne'er shall grieve: most blessed are these ties,
Although a bitter penalty awaits them.
If it must be ascribed to guilt in Rome
To be possess'd of children, I, in this,
Would first be criminal, of this abuse
Would first obtain redress. Upon the day
When I became a husband, Rome was free.
Free on the day, when thou didst give to me
The sure and single pledge of thy chaste love,
Mine own Virginia; yes, mine, too much!
Born, and since bred, beneath the sacred shade
Of thine own country's laws, thou wert, oh, daughter!
My fondest hope: the magistrates were then
The guardians of our lives, our wealth, our honour;
Are they not now become their plunderers?
Ah, daughter, . . . check thy tears; compel me not
To weep;—Not because weeping I esteem

Unworthy of a Roman soldier ; no,
When tainted honour, or the outraged laws,
Or a wrong'd daughter, from his struggling heart
Wring the unwilling tear ; but with these tears
Redress is not procured.

Virginia. And thinkest thou,
Had I been, haply, of the stronger sex,
That I, a child of thine, to those who dared
Insult me with the epithet of slave,
Had made rejoinder with effeminate tears ?
Weak, and a woman, am I ; and I lose
My consort, and my father, all, yes, all ! . . .

Ici. Thou hast lost nothing yet. Hope yet remains :

Us, and the people, and the gods themselves,
Thou hast in thy defence : but if in vain,
If there remain no means for thee t' escape,
Except with us, thou die ; . . . I speak it trembling, . . .
Thy parents speak it to thee by their silence . . .
Thou, then, with us shalt die. Thy noble hand
I with my sword will arm, with my own blood,
Yet warm and reeking : and thou then shalt hear
My last free words, recalling to thy mind,
That thou wer't daughter of a valiant Roman,
Thyself free, Roman, and my spouse. Oh thought,
That freezes my sad heart ! thank heaven, it is
Yet premature.

Virginia. It is the only thought
That can sustain my life. Oh ! if thou seest
My tears, 'tis not my destiny I weep,
But thine. For loftiest enterprizes born,
Thou wert design'd to be the pride of Rome :
I weep to see thee, and in vain, reduced,

For my obscure and private wrongs to combat ;
To see, for thee, each path to real fame
Closed up for ever ; finally, to see
In thee a soul so eminently Roman,
Since Rome is now no more.

Virginius. And thou art not
My daughter ? Let those hear thee who deny it !

Nu. She is the prop of our declining age ;
The only prop. Oh daughter ! I would die
A thousand, thousand times, rather than lose thee.

Ici. Beloved Virginia, strong that love must be
That is express'd so strongly ; of us both
'Tis worthy ; similar to mine it glows.
But these hard times forbid all interchange
Of soft affection. Our sole mutual pledge,
Of conjugal and of parental love,
Must be a promise of united death.

Virginius. Ah, my own children ! . . . must it then
be so ?

And must such virtue perish ? . . . Numitoria,
And those the real sons of Rome, and ours,
That might from them be born, a generous race !
Shall we ne'er clasp them in our tremulous arms ?
Oh what a seed of heroes dies with them,
If plants like these, so noble, lofty, generous,
Be doom'd indeed to perish prematurely !

Ici. If we had children, we must weep indeed,
But in another guise : to an extremity
We should be brought, or forced to leave them
slaves . . .

My children slaves ! . . . Ah ! I would kill them first.
I am not a father, if I were . . .

Virginius. Thy words

Flash'd like a horrible lightning on 'my breast :—
I do beseech thee cease.

Nu. I am a mother,
And feel what thou dost say in all its force.
Reduced to tears alone, why have not we,
Sad mothers ! strength proportion'd to our grief.

Ici. Fathers and husbands have like grief to you,
And greater boldness. Still do I retain
The hope to rescue her. Perchance alone,
Virginus and myself in Rome now stand,
But we suffice to rouse in a whole people
Passion and life.

Virginus. Alas ! 'tis not in words,
(However strong and passionate they be,)
To rouse a people that in fetters languish ;
Or to elicit from their slumb'ring soul
Actions of steady masculine revenge :
Excess of injury and blood alone
Can work this miracle in callous hearts.
'Twas indispensable to rescue Rome
From th' impious Tarquins, that an innocent lady,
Basely contaminated, by her own hands
Should fall transfix'd on earth, in blood immers'd,
Victim at once, and pledge of victory.

Virginia. If it be requisite that innocent blood,
But not contaminated yet, be shed,
To rouse this people from its lethargy,
Strike ; husband, father, strike : behold the breast.
Am I too dear to you ? fear ye to plunge
The weapon in my bosom ? I fear not ;
Give, give the sword to me. Collected Rome
My death shall witness : such a spectacle
Will reillumine their ancient love of freedom ;

The banner of revenge shall flout the air
Empurpled with my blood: the men of war
In it shall emulously dip their swords,
And in the tyrants bosoms, to the hilt
Shall plunge those swords anointed to revenge.

Virginus. Ah daughter, . . . what perplexity of
dread,

And new-born ardour dost thou make in me!

Ici. Tear not by little and by little thus
A father's heart already truly Roman.
What boots it to exhort each other now
To death? From our great ancestors are we
Degenerate? We shall have ascertain'd,
In a few hours, whether we ought to die.
Thou, oh *Virginus*, with thy wife and daughter,
Do thou return to see, once more, thy dwelling.
This is the last night, perhaps, in which to thee
So great a consolation will be granted.
Ah, hapless father, transient is the time
For the indulgence of thy deep affections!

Virginus. Oh bitter night! . . . Let us depart, *Ici-*
lius;

By dawn to-morrow thou shalt see me here.

Ici. Here first shall I be to dispose a few,
But hardy spirits, to sublime endeavour.
Now go: thou also wilt be well convinced
To-morrow, that no scheme remains for us,
Excepting mine, of blood. Living or dead,
Oh spouse, we shall be fully blest to-morrow.

Virginia. With thee, living or dead, I'm always
bless'd.

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

*Appius, Marcus.**Ap.* Virginius in Rome?*Mar.* 'Tis but too true.*Ap.* Hast thou beheld him?*Mar.* With these eyes I saw him.

Thou also wilt behold him here ere long,
For he is seeking thee.

Ap. How from the camp
Could he depart, if an express command
Of mine detain'd him there?

Mar. Thy interdict
Perchance arrived too late; the generals
Perchance were loath t' enforce it...

Ap. The commands
Of Appius, who e'er was loath t' obey?
I rather guess Icilius forestall'd me...
Thence shall he reap the recompence he merits.
Already, ere Virginia had been dragged
To the tribunal, had a messenger
Been to her sire dispatch'd. At his approach
The aspect of our enterprize is changed:
Yet not for this...

Mar. Already, bathed in tears,
The parents, with their daughter, through the streets,
Through every pathway, suppliantly run,
Muffled in squalid garb, and in their course
They leave behind a formidable track
Of tears and indignation: here, perchance

Ere long, thou wilt behold them. But in guise
 Far different to theirs, by multitudes,
 Encreasing instantaneously, begirt,
 The fierce Icilius, throughout the city,
 Clad in habiliments of battle, speeds.
 He menaces, adjures, exhorts, attests.—
 The mother's tears, the virgin's loveliness,
 The hoary valour of the warlike father,
 The factious outcries of their former tribune,
 A formidable aliment provide
 To a more formidable flame :—take heed.

Ap. Do thou take heed, and tremble for thyself;
 And if thou wilt, for me : since for myself
 I shall not tremble.—Go, I see Virginius
 Coming towards me ; leave me with him alone.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Appius, Virginius.

Ap. And darest thou thy colours and the camp
 Abandon thus ? The Roman soldiers then
 Do now at will, come, go, or quit their posts ?

Virginius. There is a reason that might super-
 sede

The strictest laws. Yet in this exigence
 Those austere laws of military duty,
 Which I too long have kept, have not been broken.
 I ask'd for leave of absence, and obtain'd it.—
 I quit my station in my daughter's cause,
 And this thou know'st.

Ap. What can'st thou say for her,
 Except that which the laws suggest to me
 In language more imperative than thine.

Virginius. Hear me. I am a father to my cost!
And as a father tremble. Unelated
Do I behold the people crowd around me,
And in my favour menacingly shout.
I know thy power is great; that to attempt
By force to cope with it were hazardous;
And that I may precipitate this Rome
In bitterest calamities, and fail
To rescue from thy grasp my hapless daughter.
Then, Appius, menace not: I know how far
Thou hast the power to injure me; but think,
Ah think a little, to what risk immense
Thou dost expose thyself, if thou persist.

Ap. Are these or prayers or menaces? Am I
The sole and absolute disposer here
Of what the laws decree? Have I the power
To tear a daughter from her real father?
Rather should I, and such is my design,
Secure her to that father with my blood.
What avail prayers, if she be not thy child?
The rancour, which thy words but ill conceal,
I know from whence it comes. Icilius,
Thy heart hath clouded with his dark suspicions;
He who makes calumny the instrument
Of his ambitious views. To such a miscreant
Canst thou yield credence? and canst thou, who art
The most exemplary of citizens,
Chuse for thy son-in-law the worst of rebels?
Together with him wilt thou lose thy daughter?
The ruin of Icilius is decreed;
And as he hopes to have, he will not gain
An honourable death. Clandestinely
He against Rome conspires, and cherishes

Abominable schemes. He calls us tyrants;
 But in his breast he nourishes the thought
 Of a far fiercer tyranny than ours.
 He would destroy the senate: afterwards
 Enslave the people; yet he talks of freedom.
 More deadly in proportion is his poison,
 As 'tis conceal'd beneath a specious semblance.
 Here doth he raise the signal of a rebel,
 And there he breathes the whispers of a traitor.
 I to his violence, violence will oppose,
 And thwart his treasons by preventive arts.
 All is foreseen already. Thou know'st not
 His dark contrivances; to his designs
 Now, as an instrument, he goads thee on,
 Now, as a veil, to cloak his purposes;
 Beneath thy character he screens himself,
 But never will he share with thee his plunder.
 That thou dost love, e'en as thou lov'st thy daughter,
 Thy country, he well knows; hence he affects
 To be the avenger of thy daughter's cause;
 But with his comrades afterwards he laughs
 At thy credulity. From thee he hides it;
 To them he scruples not to shew himself
 In his true shape, th' oppressor of his country.

Virginus. Daughters are torn from their afflicted
 mothers;

From fathers torn, who in their country's service
 The prime of life have spent; the magistrates
 Appal us more than e'en our enemies;
 Then how can Rome another tyrant dread?

Ap. Icilius, I know it, with a tale
 Of idle love dares to asperse my name.
 What are his proofs? His boundless insolence,

The cries of the besotted multitude,
 And my unwary clemency, are proofs.
 This Marcus is my client; he demands
 Thy daughter, I must then that daughter love,
 And be her ravisher. Choice arguments!

Virginus. This doth Icilius alone affirm?
 Others attest the same.

Ap. Perhaps thy daughter,
 Suborn'd by him . . .

Virginus. There are too many proofs,
 Whose utterance shame, not less than rage, forbids;
 Nor is it a light proof that thou dost strive
 To clear thyself to me.

Ap. Thou art resolv'd
 With the conspirators t' unite thyself?

Virginus. I am resolv'd to die, or keep my daughter.

Ap. I love thee, and I therefore wish thee safe.

Virginus. And wherefore lovest me?

Ap. Rome may require
 Thy arm in her defence: ah leave, I pray thee,
 Icilius to his fate; leave him to perish:
 He alone merits it. We prize thy life.

Virginus. I understand thee; thou dost deem me
 fit

For servitude . . .

Ap. No: Equal I esteem thee,
 If not superior, to any Roman;
 And, as a proof of this, scarce shall thy feet
 Have reach'd the camp, ere thou shall be promoted
 To the supreme command.

Virginus. And dost thou dare
 To bribe me to compliance? Shall I owe

That meed to Appius' favour, which alone
Is due to valour? To acquire that favour,
What crime have I committed? From the camp,
Alas! e'en from the camp is honour fled;
This Rome, and, what is worse, Rome's foes know
well;

Those, who, a boast, not heretofore enjoyed,
May now exult in, on the back to have pierced
More than one son of Rome. 'Tis true, the wounds,
The honour'd wounds, which on my breast I shew
thee,

Such as the Roman mothers bless'd ere while
When they beheld them on their sons, are now
Received unluckily, and will assume
A less imposing aspect, since we fight
Beneath thy banners. I have pledg'd myself
To Rome, by an inviolable oath,
That, if I ever to the camp return,
Rome shall be born again. Thy words to me
Are fraught with craft; my heart is on my lips.
A soldier, father, citizen, am I:
Of evils foreign to myself I speak not;
While Rome endures them, I endure them also.—
But my Virginia . . .

Ap. 'Twas not I that first
Incited Marcus to contest his claim,
Though thus by lying fame I am aspers'd;
Yet, perhaps, I can dissuade him from the project.
For thee I feel compassion: and perchance,
Without commotion, or the chance of blood,
I might restore thy daughter to thy arms,
If thou felt'st for her as a father should.
But thou dost thirst for blood; dost wish to see

*Please look in the margin
saved only by death*

ACT THE FOURTH.

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Thy daughter wedded to Icilius,
And wouldst involve that daughter, with thyself,
In the destruction of a miscreant traitor.

Virginius. To me canst thou restore her?

Ap. If thou wilt
Refuse her to Icilius.

Virginius. She is his
By a sworn compact.

Ap. He'll release thee from it;
To day . . . by death . . . Go, go, there now remains
But a few moments for mature reflection.
Thy child is thine, if not to Icilius given :
But if she be his wife, no power of mine
Can hinder her from perishing with him.

Virginius. Unhappy sire! . . . To what am I re-
duced? . . .

SCENE THE THIRD.

Appius.

Ap. He is too much a Roman. Appius
Himself might fear, if Rome within her walls
Had many such as he. But two, no more,
Two are the Romans worthy of my hatred :
And one is aged, and he is a father ;
Strong fetters these : his own rash insolence
Shall be the engine of the other's ruin.
To make him victim of his headstrong passion
Shall be my project . . . But who do I see ?
Behold Virginia and her mother come
Amid the people's tears. I now must try
Or to intimidate, or to seduce them.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Appius, Numitoria, Virginia.

Ap. While time remains to you, and it is short,
 Withdraw a little from that boisterous train,
 Which rather may endanger than protect you.
 You see me not at present as a judge :
 Approach, Virginia ; hear me ; thou wilt see me
 Wearing ere long a different aspect here.

Virginia. Hast thou, oh Appius, spoken with my
 father ?

Nu. Hast thou repented ? Hast thou, taught by
 fear,
 Learned to be more discreet ?

Ap. By fear, say'st thou ? . . .
 No, but by pity. Hear me ; and my words
 Will prove my heart is not impress'd by fear.
 Virginia, I love thee ; with my lips
 I ratify my fondness : violence
 There can be none, to snatch thee from my power ;
 But many reasons why thou shouldst submit.

Virginia. Is this thy change ? ah, mother, let us go.

Ap. Remain, and hear me. Art thou then, Vir-
 ginia,
 For thy Icilius so infatuated ?
 In him, if enterprising ardour please thee,
 Am I perchance less passionate than he ?
 Does his rank charm thee ? Though he be once
 more

A tribune, could he thus with me compare ?
 If his free heart and independent feelings ?
 Does not my breast a nobler heart contain,

More independent feelings? I, who mean
To make himself, and all his partisans,
Submit to my authority; while they
Obey my nod . . .

Nu. And dost thou thus presume
To unveil thy purposes? . . .

Ap. I am advanced
So far; so little now remains to do,
That I dare manifest them openly.
How great I am, your thought cannot conceive:
The tongue of Marcus, as the sword of thousands,
Is under my controul. If thou refuse
To be Icilius' spouse, I instantly
The process set aside.

Virginia. Abandon him? . . .
Ah, rather . . .

Nu. Oh, audacious turpitude!
Oh, miscreant! . . .

Ap. Dost thou think that his regard
Can bear comparison with mine? His tales
Of liberty, his tribunitial office,
Conspiracies and tumults, are his passion.
Long was he silent; now he deems thyself
A means once more of reinstalling him:
His turbulent ambition makes him speak,
And not his love for thee. But grant, that I
Should also, in this undertaking, brave
Imminent danger; thence thou mayest infer
Th' immeasurable ardour of my love:
Power, life, and fame, for thee I have endanger'd.
All am I ready, for thy dear love's sake,
To sacrifice; Icilius from that love
Hopes all to gain.

Virginia. No more.—Icilius vile,
By this comparison of thyself with him,
Nor thyself noble, canst thou ever make.
Short is the pallel : within himself
He has the all, of which thou hast no part :
Nothing of him can ever be in thee :
As much as I hate thee, I love Icilius.
Why dost thou speak of love ? Dar'st thou bestow
A name so sacred on thy impious lust ?
Not that I e'er would be so, but in thought
It never yet hath entered in thy heart
To seek me as a spouse ? . . .

Ap. The time perchance . . .

Virginia. Think not that I shall ever . . .

Nu. Thou didst mean

To mock us : oh indignity ! . . .

Virginia. Thou miscreant,

To no condition canst thou make me listen.

Ap. 'Tis well : thou shalt at last fall in my power,
All sprinkled with the life-blood of thy lover.

Virginia. Oh Heaven ! . . .

Ap. Yes, sprinkled with thy lover's blood,
And with thy sire's.

Nu. Oh impious !

Virginia. My father !

Ap. All. At my nod falls whomsoe'er I will :
The fate of Siccius proclaim'd this truth.
One hour is wanting now, or ere I give
A signal for the massacre.

Virginia. Icilius ! . . .

One hour ! one hour alone ! Oh, Appius, pity !
My lover . . . and my father . . .

Nu. Two such heroes

Expiring at thy nod? And dost thou think
That thence thy power will be impregnable?

Ap. And should the whole with me be overturn'd,
Would such an universal crash restore
Virginius and Icilius?

Virginia. Appius,
Thou mak'st me tremble...

Nu. ... Ah! ... do listen to me.
What, if I supplicate?

Ap. With but one word
She saves the lives of both.

Virginia. ... Appius ... suspend
For this one day the blow ... I do conjure thee.
Meanwhile I'll banish every thought of marriage ...
Severed from me, ah let Icilius live;
I will endeavour from my heart to tear
His image ... and from him I will withdraw
My hopes, all placed in him so many years;
Perchance ... meanwhile ... the power of time ...
alas!

What can I more? Ah! let Icilius live:
Before thy feet I prostrate fall. But I,
Alas! what do I do? ... what do I say?
Time will still make me hate thee more and more,
And more Icilius love. I will fear nothing;
We are Romans: and my lover and my father
Would never keep a life that was the fruit
Of their dishonour: if they once are slain,
Nothing remains for me to lose. In time
Wilt thou not give to me a sword, oh mother?

Nu. Come ... come ... oh daughter ... gods there
are in Heaven,
The avengers of oppressed innocence;

Come : let us trust in them . . .

Virginia. Ah, do thou be
The prop of my weak frame . . . my footsteps falter . . .

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Appius.

Ap. And am I baffled yet ? To Appius
Fresh obstacles are only fresh incentives :
Plebeian beauty, who hadst scarcely warm'd,
Unaided by events, this heart of mine,
With a slight, transient flame, now that for thee
Rome shudders with disdain, immoveably,
Profoundly in my bosom thou art fixed ;
Now much as is the very power I grasp at,
Nay more, art thou essential to my peace.
But the sixth hour approaches. Let us see
If all is ready to convince the people,
That in themselves no longer, but in me,
Is centred all the majesty of Rome.

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Virginius, Icilius, with Followers.

Virginius. The fatal hour arrives. Icilius, see,
On every side the forum teems with arms.
And all around . . .

Ici. Close by my side I see
A train, though less, of loftier hardihood.

Virginius. Dost thou confide in them ?

Ici. I in myself
Confide.

Virginius. In me, as much as in thyself,
Thou ought'st to trust. Before the time I come
A little space ; for I was well assured
That I should find thee here. But, in few words,
Permit me, while there is a time for speech,
To question thee concerning thy designs.
Should we unloose the decemviral fetters,
How am I to accost thee ? By what name,
So long as thou art within the walls of Rome ?

Ici. A Roman, citizen, and free ; the peer
Of every Roman ; only than the laws
Less great ; greater alone than any king.
But thou suggestest a tremendous doubt
To me, a Roman, Roman as thou art ;
But thou dost not offend me : in thy breast
The vile suspicion never had arisen,
No never, had not Appius inspired it.

Virginius. Infamous times ! The powerful conde-
scend,

E'en as the powerless, to practise fraud.
I did not think it . . . but so well did Appius
Colour his phrases . . . what avails it now ?
If yet I trusted him, one look of thine
Fills me with more of settled confidence
Than all the oaths of Appius. Ah, the miscreant,
I swear it is as possible that I
Should e'er to thee be faithless and thy cause,
As it is possible that thou shouldst be
By thine own heart, by thine own sword betray'd.

Ici. I do trust to thee ; and to thee alone,
No, not in these : though they an hour ago

Fiercely to me, and Rome, did pledge their faith:
Fear, calumny, and gold, may take them from me :
The arms of Appius all ; unknown to heroes,
But yet too efficacious. Now, let come
What may come, if the tyrant persevere.
In his iniquitous designs, he dies.
That he is apprehensive, he has shewn
By his attempt to practise on thy faith :
In the corruption of the affrighted people
Does he confide : too sure a cause for trust.
If Appius die, nine tyrants yet remain,
Less powerful indeed, and all dispersed ;
Yet in whose power are placed the nerve of Rome,
Both of our armies. Freedom thus appears,
Which perhaps few wish, and thou alone deservest,
But too too doubtful : vengeance thus alone
Seems to me certain. I see all its danger :
And for this reason wish the more to brave it.

Virginius. Oh great of heart ! In thee this day
will Rome

See herself die, or rise again in thee.
Yield only to my unimpair'd old age
Th' honour of giving signal for the combat.
Be it mine to indicate the when and how
We are to draw our swords. Fix on my eye
Thy steady eye, and on thy sword thy hand ;
Meanwhile the aspect of the assembled people
We will observe ; 'twill be, perchance, expedient,
To make the blow more sure, to affect at first
Conciliatory manners : I beseech thee,
Let all thy movements be controul'd by mine.

Ici. Thou art a Roman and a father. Give
The signal for attack ; and thou shalt see

My strokes more rapid than the lightning's flash.
Virginus. Go ; thou shouldst lead the helpless ladies hither :

Mingle thy followers with the common people ;
It would be best that Appius, when he comes,
Should find me here alone. I will address
To him ambiguous words : meanwhile, the place
Most opportune, whence we may fall on Appius,
I will espy. I here await thy coming :
When thou returnest, do not wear a look
Imprudently audacious : check thy fury
For a short time ; the hour approaches fast,
When, on this spot, it all may spend itself.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Virginus.

Virginus. Oh Rome ! . . . oh daughter ! now I fear
from nothing,
Save from Icilius' too intemperate valour.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Appius, Virginus.

Ap. Hast thou at last resolved ?

Virginus. A long time since.

Ap. As should a father ?

Virginus. As a Roman father.

Ap. Thou with Icilius every tie hast broken ?

Virginus. Three powerful ties bind me to him.

Ap. They are ?

Virginus. The ties of blood, of friendship, and of
virtue.

Ap. Perfidious as thou art ! these boasted ties
Blood shall perpetuate.

Virginus. I am most willing
That they with blood should be perpetuated.
I know that 'tis in vain for me to oppose thee,
Yet I prepare myself to suffer death
Sooner than loose my daughter from my grasp ;
I cannot more than this : the gods, I hope,
Will one day signally avenge my cause.

Ap. Seest thou the gods of Appius ? The arm'd
troops
With which I am surrounded. Well I know,
That by avowed and by clandestine means
Ye do prepare to cope with me by arms :
On my side are the laws ; licence on yours :
I should reap glory even from defeat ;
To you success would only bring disgrace.
Already the ferocious multitude,
In " numbers without number," crowd the forum :
Trust to that multitude : whate'er it wills,
It always has the power to execute.
Behold Virginia weeping ; in her train
Her shrieking mother comes with hair dishevell'd,
And her clothes rent. What clamorous turbulence ?
With what a howling do the heavens resound !
Who knows what number of arm'd partizans
Icilius hath inveigled to the forum !

SCENE THE FOURTH.

*Numitoria, Virginia, Appius, Virginius, Marcus,
People, Lictors.*

Nu. Oh treachery!

People. Oh unauspicious day!

Virginia. At least thou yet art living, oh my father!

Alas, thou know'st not all . . . *Icilius!*

Virginius. What is become of him? I see him not.

Nu. Dead is Icilius.

Virginius. What do I hear?

Oh heavens!

Ap. Who was so bold, as thus to wreak
Vengeance upon him in defence of Rome;
Without awaiting that he were condemn'd
By the just rigour of the laws?

Nu. Ah wretch!

And dar'st thou thus dissemble? To the forum
With us he came, depending on his valour;
When, lo! his own adherents came to him
With menacing deportment, face to face,
Aruns, and Faustus, and Cesonius,
And others with them arm'd: first Aruns cried,
"Thou art a traitor, then?" . . . Hence, in an instant,

Inflamed with passion, and with frantic howlings,
They drew their swords, and leapt together on him.
Icilius, always ready for defence,
E'en ere a word he utter'd, in a circle
Brandished his flaming sword. Aruns fell first;
All who had courage to attack him fell.

Then to the astonished multitude from far
The most intimidated cried: "Ah Romans,
"Icilius is a traitor: he would be
"In Rome a king." Scarce had that name been
heard,

Ere all around on every side assault him,
And instantaneous was his death.

Virginus. Alas!

What an unworthy death for such a hero!

Nu. The swords of others ne'er avail'd to smite
him;

He turned his own against himself, and cried,
"I will not be a king; nor be a slave.

"My spouse, learn to die free from my example."

Virginia. Alas! I heard thy dying words distinctly . . .

Beloved husband; I will follow thee . . .

Three times I saw the sword within thy breast
Plunged by thy own right-hand; towards that sword
I stretched my firm hand, but in vain . . .

Nu. The crowd

Has driven us onward from the horrible sight,
And here impell'd us.

Virginus. Now Icilius falls,

Appius is king in Rome.

Ap. Oh, Romans, hear . . .

Icilius, and his faithless partizans,
Alone were instrumental to his fate.

Conscious of his misdeeds, he would by death
Somewhat atone for his opprobrious life.

He died a Roman; though he lived not one.

I ne'er myself should have chastised the traitor;
He was too dear to you: but time at last

Brings every thing to light, and has removed
 The fatal bandage from the people's eyes.
 The multitude had called it tyranny
 If I had sentenced him to punishment;
 And yet so worthy did he seem of death,
 E'en to his own adherents.

Virginus. Appius,

No man dost thou deceive : all here behold
 The author of this horrible treachery.
 Icilius slain, thou more than half hast gain'd
 Thy impious cause. Now with impunity
 Appius proceed, and let us hear the sentence.
 But what do I demand? Who reads it not
 In every face of this arm'd multitude?
 And in the silence of affrighted Rome?

Ap. What now, ye traitors? Since ye have in vain
 Wished for rebellion, if ye are betrayed
 By your own creatures, why do ye blame me?
 Where is the wonder, if to one so faithless
 They were themselves unfaithful? Sons of Rome,
 I now address myself to you alone.

Ye see around you armed troops dispersed
 'Tis true, but solely for the good of Rome.)

To your unanimous and upright wishes
 Who dares oppose himself? Assuredly
 Not I: but I have thus willed it to be,
 That I might so defend against a few,
 A factious few, the majesty of Rome,
 Centred in me by universal suffrage.
 Perhaps in Icilius the last traitor died?

Lictors, surround Virginus with your axes
 Till sentence be pronounced. To evil deeds
 He comes with evil thoughts: if he hath reasons

*will never
 kill with
 of opposition*

To urge in his defence, let him produce them ;
But thwart him if he seeks redress by force.

Nu. Alas !

Virginia. Ah wretched me ! My father also ?

Virginus. 'Tis true I am a traitor, for I am
Virginia's father ; as Icilius was,
Being her husband ; all are traitors, all
That do refuse to prostitute their wives
And daughters to his lust. Are ye not yet
Fully convinced of his atrocity ?
Romans, although ye see me innocent,
Yet with Icilius, and with thousand others,
Let me be dragg'd to death : but ah, defend
That virtuous virgin ; to a lot she's destined
Worse, worse, a thousand times than any death.
Not for myself do I thus supplicate ;
For her I tremble ; and for her I weep.

Nu. And do not all of you with us shed tears ?
Oh fathers, learn, from our example learn,
What ye have to expect . . . all, all are silent ?
Hard-hearted . . . cruel . . . Mothers, hear me then :
Oh ye alone who truly love the offspring
Sprung from your blood, and nourished in your
womb ;

Here to have children is too great a crime.
Mothers, if you their honour, or your own,
Regard, oh plunge, soon as they see the light,
The fatal weapon in their innocent breasts.

Ap. Listen, ye mothers, to a mother's love ?
Who sees not now that she is not the mother ?
And that her husband is by her deceived ?
Of me ye asked the presence of Virginus,
And 'twas most just, that he should witness be

Of such a trial : see him, here he is ;
But can his presence interdict that I
Boldly pronounce an equitable sentence ?
The witnesses of Marcus I've examined,
And lastly Marcus ; they agree. His right,
I swear it to the people, is established :
The specious imposition of the mother
Is more than proved by evidence like this ;
Whence by a subtle counterchange she seeks
To gain by tumults, a cause lost by truth.
I grieve to be obliged to undeceive
The still deluded sire—and yet I ought.
Marcus, Virginia's thine ; to thine own slave
Thy just pretension I cannot refuse.

Nu. Was e'er such sentence given ? Will no one
hear me ?

Virginia. Mother, thou seest my father, how, alas !
With axes he's encompassed : he cannot
Exert himself for me ; scarce can he speak ;
And speaks in vain. Give me the sword ; thou hast it ;
By thee 'twas promised to me : I have lost
Icilius ; shall I lose my honour also ?

Virginus. Oh impious herd of despicable slaves !
Are ye by fear thus palsied ? Ye forget,
So that ye may prolong a wretched life,
Your honour, and your children, and your country.
I hear a scarce distinguishable murmur ;
But no one moves. Ah vile, ah doubly vile !
May each of you have such a lot as mine ;
If possible a worse : of property,
Of honour, children, wives, and liberty,
Of arms, and lastly robb'd of intellect,
Ah may the tyrant, amid lengthen'd torments,

Take from you, what is scarcely now your own,
Your infamous and prostituted lives,
Which ye would purchase at so vile a price.

Ap. 'Tis true, Rome murmurs, but at thee alone.
Be silent now. This instant to her master,
Lictors, conduct the slave ; and be not baffled
By the seditious grief of the feign'd mother :
Tear from her arms her surreptitious daughter.

Nu. Ye first shall slay me.

Virginia. Mother !

People. Luckless day !

Virginius. Appius, delay, and hear me for a moment :

Delay, and hear me, I beseech thee. I
Brought up this virgin as my only child ;
More than myself I hitherto have loved her :
If my wife utters falsehoods, to the fraud
I am not accessory.

Nu. What do I hear ?

Canst thou consent thus to degrade thy wife ?
Is thus Virginius changed ?

Virginia. Canst thou decide
At such a moment to desert me thus ?
Dost thou account me then no longer thine ?

Virginius. Whate'er I may account thee, I do
love thee,

As should the tenderest father love his daughter.
Ah, Appius, suffer thou, that, yet once more,
Ere I for ever lose her, I may clasp
Her that I always as a child have loved.
My pride is humbled, it is broken, nothing :
In thee do I adore the majesty,
The institutions, and the gods of Rome.
But can I in a day, nay, in an instant,

Of that paternal love divest myself,
Which for so many happy years has been
The best part of my life?

Ap. May Heaven forbid
That I should e'er to such a pitch be cruel,
As to ascribe to guilt a love so just.
Once more thyself, thou speakest as thou oughtest,
And as I ought I answer thee. For him,
Lictors, at once make way.

Virginus. Ah come, oh daughter,
To my paternal breast. With such a name,
'Tis sweet to me yet once more to accost thee . . .
Once more.—The last pledge of paternal love ;
I give thee—death and freedom.

Virginia. Oh . . . true . . . father.

Nu. Oh Heaven! my daughter . . .

Ap. Miscreant, what hast thou done?
Lictors, ah! quickly . . .

Virginus. To the infernal gods
Do I devote thy head with this pure blood.

People. Oh sight atrocious! Appius is a tyrant.

Virginus. Romans, are ye now stirr'd to rage?
'tis late :

'Twill not restore life to the innocent.

People. The tyrant Appius dies.

Ap. The parricide
And his adherents die.

Virginus. Before we die,
Heroes, there yet is time for vengeance.¹

¹ Virginus and the people are about to assault the lictors and the satellites of Appius.

Ap. Time¹
To punish thee before I die remains.
Virginus. The tyrant Appius dies.²
People. The tyrant dies.³

¹ Appius and his followers advance to repel the people and Virginus.

² The curtain falls.

³ A great tumult, and the clang of arms, are heard.

AGAMEMNON.

A TRAGEDY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

AGAMEMNON.

ELECTRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

People.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Soldiers.

SCENE,—The Palace in Argos.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Ægisthus.

Ægis. Oh bloody, angry, discontented shade
Of unavenged Thyestes, why pursue me?
Leave me, oh leave me, nor torment me thus;
Visit once more the sluggish Stygian waves.
All, all thy furies fill my breast; thy blood,
Too surely, runs through all my veins. I know
That I am the offspring of flagitious incest,
To guilt predoomed; nor is it requisite,
To bring this to my mind, that I should see thee.
That Agamemnon now returns to Argos
A haughty conqueror from 'Troy, I know.
Within his palace I expect him here;
Let him return; his triumph will be short,
I swear to thee. Vengeance shall guide my steps:

Vengeance resounds within my heart ; the time
 Approaches for it ; thou shalt have it ; here
 More than one victim thou shalt have, Thyestes ;
 The blood of Atreus thou shalt drink in streams.
 But I must have recourse to art, or ere
 I use the sword : unaided, and alone,
 Against a powerful king I stand : can I,
 If in my breast my fury and my hate
 I do not hide, victory o'er him obtain ?

SCENE THE SECOND.

Ægisthus, Clytemnestra.

Cly. *Ægisthus*, evermore I find thee thus
 A prey to gloomy thoughts in solitude ?
 From me thou hidest thy corroding cares,
 From me ? . . . Must I then see thee fly from her
 Who breathes alone for thee ?

Ægis. I do confess
 I am too much an alien in this palace.
 'Tis true, thou trustest to me ; and my foot
 Within these thresholds I had never planted,
 Hadst thou not fill'd the throne : I hither came,
 Thou knowest, for thy sake, and here remain
 For thee. But ah, the day, the fatal day,
 Already is approaching, on the which,
 Thou . . . e'en thyself . . . wilt banish me from hence.

Cly. What saidst thou ? I ? and dost thou think
 it ? no !

But little, nothing, do my oaths avail ;
 Thou for thyself shalt witness, if I cherish,
 In this enamour'd bosom, any thought
 Except of thee alone.

Ægis. And though I were
 Thy heart's sole object, yet, if I esteem
 Thy honour more important than my life,
 I should destroy, and will destroy myself,
 Ere I disturb thy peace ; or be the means
 To obscure thy fame, or rob thee but in part
 Of Agamemnon's love. From hence to go
 A fugitive, neglected, and obscure,
 This is the destiny to which I am doomed,
 The unhappy offspring of accursed Thyestes.
 I am accounted of an infamous sire,
 Though innocent, the son more infamous still.
 I want wealth, power, and arrogance of carriage,
 To cancel the misfortune of my birth,
 And the opprobrium of my father's name. *reproach + distaste*
 Not thus Atrides . . . He returns renowned,
 The conqueror of Troy ; and can I hope
 That he will e'er endure the sight in Argos,
 Of the detested offspring of Thyestes,
 His most implacable and mortal foe ?

Cly. If he return, his recent victories
 Will, from his mind, obliterate all thought
 Of animosities in years long past.
 A conquering king will banish from his breast
 Hatred towards one whom he no longer fears.

Ægis. 'Tis true, that, on my own account, I cannot
 By any one be feared ; alone, an exile,
 Oppressed with wretchedness, bereft of power,
 Atrides will not condescend to hate me ;
 But perhaps he may despise me ; and would'st thou
 That I stay'd here exposed to such an outrage ?
 Dost thou exhort me to do this, and love me ?

Cly. Thou lovest me, and yet canst entertain

The cruel thought of leaving me for ever ?

Ægis. 'Tis useless now, oh queen, to flatter thee.
By hard necessity, I am compelled
To make a declaration of my thoughts.
Provided that Atrides could forget
The injuries of my father, canst thou hope
That he would not discover, or if he
Discovered, would dissemble his disgrace,
Feign not to see, or feign not to believe,
Our guilty outrage of his nuptial love ?
If I stayed here I ought to avoid thy presence ;
And should drag on a melancholy life,
Worse than the worst of deaths. If now and then
I came into thy sight, one sigh alone,
One gesture, might betray me : what would be
The consequence ? 'Tis too, too true ! The least,
Slightest suspicion in a proud king's heart
Makes those who are its objects culpable
Of every crime. I think not of myself ;
Nought for myself I fear ; I ought indeed
To give thee of true love this terrible proof.

Cly. Perchance, who knows ? more than thou
dost suspect

The peril may be distant, or be past :
Many revolving moons have now return'd
Since fell the walls of Troy ; yet still Atrides
Tarries, and still arrives not. Thou know'st well
It is reported, that the Grecian fleet,
By violent winds long driven, at length were scat-
ter'd.

Perchance the day is come that brings to me
A sure revenge at last, though long delay'd,
For the unnatural murder of my daughter.

Ægis. And if this were the day, ah would'st thou
deign,

The illustrious widow of the king of kings,
To cast a look on me, the obscure branch
Of an abhorred blood? on me, the sport
Of inauspicious fate? on me, deprived
Of wealth, of arms, of subjects, and of friends?

Cly. And add, of crimes.—'Tis true thou graspest
not

The sceptre of Atrides; but the dagger,
Trickling and reeking with my daughter's blood,
I see not in thy hands. Ere from my breast
He dared to wrest my daughter, and to drag her
A bleeding victim to the impious altar,
I call the gods to witness, that my heart
Received Atrides for its sovereign lord;
Nor did another wake a wandering thought.
But the remembrance of that fatal day,
That horrible moment, with eternal grief,
And unimaginable rage, consumes me.
' To give completion to the futile dreams
Of a crazed augur, as it was alleged,
But rather, I suspect, to gratify
The more atrocious, but less visionary,
Frantic ambition of a cruel father,
I saw my daughter immolated, torn

¹ The literal translation of this passage is as follows :

“ From the vain dreams of a fallacious augur,
From the more true ambition of an inhuman father,
I saw,” &c.

But some amplification was necessary to give perspicuity to the passage.

By stealth from me, under the false pretext
Of simulated marriage. From that day,
Down to this very time, I feel myself
Shudder with horror at the name alone
Of such a father. I have not since seen him ;
And if to-day, at length, fortune betray'd him . . .

Ægis. Fortune will never turn her back on him,
Except he should have wearied her. 'Twas she
'That to the shores of Xanthus led Atrides
Conductor of the Greeks ; 'twas she that made him,
Rather than virtue, overcome, when there,
Th' implacable resentment of Achilles,
And Hector's valour : lastly, we shall see her
Once more enthrone him in expecting Argos,
Laden with trophies, arrogant from conquest.
A long time, no, shall not elapse ere thou
Shalt have Atrides by thy side ; and he
Shall well know how thy anger to extinguish.
Pledges are living of your former love,
Electra and Orestes ; pledges still
Of interchangeable and lasting peace :
E'en as the clouds disperse before the sun,
At his return the ill-starr'd love will fly,
Which now for me thou fosterest in thy breast.

Cly. Orestes is conducive to my safety,
And to my heart Electra is most dear.
But still the tones of thy expiring voice,
Iphigenia, echo in my heart :
I hear thee cry, in supplicating accents,
Oh, mother ! canst thou love my murderer ?
No, no ; I love him not.—*Ægisthus*, thou
Hadst been a different father to my children.

Ægis. Ah, could I one day clasp them in my arms !

But that I ne'er must hope. In the dread future
 I have nothing to expect but grief and shame,
 Calamity and ruin. Yet my fate,
 Whatever it may be, I here expect,
 If 'tis thy will. Yes, here I will remain,
 Since mine the danger is; if it were thine,
 I should know how alone to fall the victim
 Of an unhappy love.

Cly. Ere that hour comes
 I will inseparably join our fates.
 Thy frank and modest language hath inflamed
 My bosom more than ever : more and more
 I see thou art worthy of a better fate.
 But see, Electra comes ; leave me with her :
 I love her ; and would fain attempt, at least,
 To mould her inclinations in thy favour.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Electra, Clytemnestra.

Elec. Mother, and must it be, that we are con-
 demned

By unpropitious fate always to tremble ;
 That thou, in vain, should'st languish for thy husband ;
 I for my father ? If day after day
 Perpetual impediments arise
 To keep from Argos her victorious monarch,
 What profits it that we have long since heard
 That Ilion's towers lie levelled with the dust ?

Cly. Is the report well founded, then, that told us
 The Grecian fleet were shipwrecked or dispersed ?

Elec. Different reports are prevalent in Argos :
 Some say, that even to the Hellespont,

By turbid and impetuous south winds,
Our fleet was driven ; while others swear to have seen
Their white sails glimmering on the coast of Argos ;
Too many, also, are there who affirm
That 'gainst a rock the royal prow was dash'd,
And that they all who sail'd in her were drown'd,
Together with our king. Unhappy we !
Mother, to whom now must we credence yield ?
How rid ourselves of doubt ? How be exempt
From fear's disquietude ?

Cly. The rebel winds,
That would not be appeased, except with blood,
At his departure, now, at his return,
Perchance require a human sacrifice.
My children, what a solace to my heart
Is it that you are in safety by my side !
At least, as I did ten years since, I need not
Now tremble for your sake.

Elec. What do I hear ?
And doth the memory of that sacrifice
Still press upon thy heart ? tremendous, fatal,
But indispensable it was. If Heaven
One of thy daughters as a sacrifice
To-day required, exultingly to-day
Would I approach the sacred altar ; I ;
To save for thee thy consort, for the Greeks
Their chief, for Argos its imperial splendour.

Cly. I know how dear to thee thy father is :
Ah, didst thou equally thy mother love !

Elec. Alike I love you : but my father is
In imminent danger ; . . . yet when thou dost hear
His hard vicissitudes, not only I
Do never see thee weep, but scarce, alas !

I see thy countenance change? Ah, didst thou love him,

Mother, as much as I! . . .

Cly. Too well I know him.

Elec. Oh Heaven! what say'st thou? thus thou didst not speak

Of him some months ago? Till there had past
Almost a lustre from the time when first
The Grecians sail'd from hence, I myself heard thee
Each day sigh more and more for his return.
To us thou talked'st of our father's exploits:
In these thou lived'st; foster'd us with these;
Speaking of him, I saw thy cheeks bedewed
With tears of genuine sorrow . . . Thou hast not
Seen him since then; he is what then he was:
But thou art changed too much; ah! is there then
Any new cause, that thus may render him
So different to his former self, to thee?

Cly. What dost thou mean? new cause? . . . my
unchanged heart

Was always thus an alien from his love.

Ah! thou know'st not . . . what shall I say? . . . Oh
daughter,

If I revealed to thee of this sad heart
The inmost thoughts . . .

Elec. Oh, that I knew them not!

Cly. Alas! what do I hear? My secret, then,
Has she discover'd? . . .

Elec. Oh, that I, at least,
And only I, thy secret had discover'd!
But know'st thou not, that, in external semblance,
Those who most reverently surround the great,
Malignantly, intensely, greedily,

Their every motion watch ? Thou, and thou only,
Now hearest not the murmur of the people;
Thinking that that from every man is hidden
Which thou but ill concealest, which alone
To thee none dare impart. Love makes thee blind.

Cly. Love ?

Ah me ! who hath betray'd me thus ?

Elec. Thyself ;

And long has it been so. From thy own lips
It was not likely that I e'er should hear
Of such a flame. To speak of it to me
Would have cost thee too much. Beloved mother,
What art thou doing ? I do not believe
That a flagitious passion fires thy breast,
Involuntary fondness, sprung from pity,
Which youth, especially when 'tis unhappy,
Is apt to inspire ; these, mother, are the baits
By which, without thyself suspecting it,
Thou hast been caught. Thou hast not, hitherto,
Each secret impulse rigorously examined ;
A bosom conscious of its rectitude,
Hardly admits suspicion of itself ;
And here, perchance, there is no ground for it :
Perchance thy fame thou yet hast scarcely sullied,
Much less thy virtue : and there still is time
To make atonement with one easy step.
Ah, by the sacred shade, so dear to thee,
Of thy devoted daughter ; by that love,
Which thou hast ever shewn and felt for me,
That love, of which to-day I am not unworthy ;
How can I more persuasively adjure thee ?
By thy son's life, Orestes' life, I pray thee,
Pause on the brink of this tremendous gulph,

Beloved mother, pause. Afar from Argos
Banish Ægisthus : stop malignant tongues
By thy deportment : with thy children weep
The hardships of Atrides : and frequent
With them the sacred temples of the gods
To implore his swift return.

Cly. Banish Ægisthus ?

Elec. Wilt thou not do it ? but thy king, my father,

Merits not thus to be by thee betray'd :
Nor will he suffer it.

Cly. But ; grant . . . that he . . .
No longer lives ?

Elec. Thou mak'st my blood run cold.

Cly. What do I say ? . . . Alas ! . . . What do I wish ?

Ah, weep the errors of a misled mother,
A mother, past recovery misled.
The lengthen'd absence of a cruel husband, . . .
The merit of Ægisthus . . . the decrees
Of an o'erruling destiny . . .

Elec. Oh Heaven !

What sayest thou ? The merit of Ægisthus ?
Ah ! thou know'st not the vices of his heart :
Springing from such a blood, it cannot be
That of one genuine virtue he's possest.
An exile, vile, the fruit of horrid incest ;
Dost thou a successor like him project
For the king of kings ?

Cly. Alas, and who am I ?

Am not I Leda's daughter, Helen's sister ?
A blood impure as their's runs in my veins.
An unknown force, of which I am not mistress,

And maddening impulses from vengeful gods,
By arts ensnare me, or by force compel.

Elec. Helen? and dost thou yet account her sister?

Ah, if thou wilt, try to resemble her;
But do not be more culpable than she.
She had no son, though she betray'd a husband.
She fled, but did not from her own descendants
The sceptre snatch. And to Ægisthus' hands
Would'st thou not only yield thyself, but yield
Thy sceptre, and thy children?

Cly. If that fate,
Oh daughter, wills, that I should be bereft
Of Agamemnon, dost thou think that I
Should from Orestes seize his father's throne?
To me a husband, but not thence a king,
Would be Ægisthus; rather he would be
A father, a protector, to Orestes.

Elec. Rather would he be an atrocious tyrant;
Of thy defenceless son the foe; and (ah!
I shudder as I think of it!) perchance
The murderer. Oh my mother, wouldst thou trust
Thy son to one who pants t' usurp his throne?
Trust Atreus grandchild to Thyestes' son? . . .
But I transgress with thee in vain the bounds
Of filial duty. Both of us indulge
The hope that still the great Atrides lives;
My heart assures me of it. His appearance
Will of itself suffice in thee t' extinguish
Each less illustrious flame; and I, as ought
A duteous daughter, swear to thee, for ever
To hide th' important secret in my breast.

Cly. Wretch that I am! In all thy words I own

The voice of truth : but in my darken'd breast
The flash of reason shines so transiently,
Leaving no track behind it, that I tremble.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Clytemnestra, Ægisthus.

Ægis. Of this erewhile I warn'd thee ; now, behold

The time for hope is gone, and come for fear.
Fortune, the gods, and favourable winds,
Bring, with full sail, Atrides into port.
I who, a short time since, might have withdrawn
From Argos, and have left thy fame unspotted,
Now must avoid the presence of the king ;
Of his imperial and despotic will
Leave thee the victim : and myself shrink back
I know not whither, banish'd from thy sight,
And die of grief. Behold, to what I am,
By thy exaggerating hopes, reduced.

Cly. Why should'st thou fly ? Of what fault art
thou guilty ?

Why should'st thou fear ? 'Tis I that am the culprit ;
But in my heart alone ; how can Atrides
Discern what passes there ?

Ægis. True love, like ours,
How can it e'er be hid ? Alas ! already
'Tis but too manifest : how, then, hop'st thou
The king should never know it ?

Cly. Who would dare
To tell it to the king, before he knew

Whether he should be punish'd or rewarded
For the infamous disclosure? Thou know'st not
The endless artifices of a court.
Invented crimes are often there alleged;
But real ones, and those especially
Which may offend his pride, are oftentimes
Not to a king divulged. Although from fear
I am not quite exempt, yet not for this
Is hope entirely banish'd from my breast.
I only ask of thee, *Ægisthus*, now,
Do not deny it me, a single day.
The danger I have hitherto conceived
Distant and doubtful; hence I find myself
With an appropriate remedy unfurnish'd.
Leave me to shape expedients to the time;
I'll scrutinize the monarch's looks and gestures.—
Thou might'st, perhaps, some time remain in Argos
Unknown to any one.

Ægis. Thyestes son,
Unknown in Argos?

Cly. For a day at least
I hope he may; and, to mature my projects,
A day will be sufficient. On my faith
Do thou meanwhile implicitly depend.
Know thou, that, sooner than abandon thee,
I am resolved to tread in Helen's footsteps.

Ægis. Know, that I rather would a thousand times
Perish, than e'er contaminate thy name.
Of mine I do not speak; by unjust fate
That is condemn'd to eternal infamy.
Ah, could I be assured, that I should lose
Nothing but life, if I remain'd in Argos!
Son of Thyestes, in Atrides' court

I must expect contempt and insolence.
And what would be the consequence, if he
Discover'd afterwards that I adored thee?
Inevitably then I should obtain
That death so much desired, how infamous.
Who knows? To witness me, in horrid torments,
Thou would'st then be compell'd; at the same time,
By that vain-glorious insolent, to hear
Thyself most bitterly reviled; if that
Indeed contented him. 'Tis love alone
That thus instructs me to be apprehensive;
For thee I tremble. Thou should'st quite forget me;
Thou yet hast time. I am obscure by birth;
Leave me to perish in obscurity.
Yes, to my fate, whate'er that fate may be,
Abandon me. I to myself from thee
Prescribe eternal exile. For thy spouse
Resume thy former fondness; though not love,
Yet heaven and fortune make him worthier of thee.

Cly. Heaven, reason, fortune, all, and all in vain,
Oppose my love. Grant this day to my prayers,
Or by my frantic words I shall defeat
All thy contrivances to guard my honour.
With a deliberate recklessness I rush
To death, and e'en to infamy: I rush,
Defying all restraint, myself to pierce
In tones of agony, Atrides' ears
With our unholy flame, and by one stroke
Thee and myself to ruin. 'Tis in vain
To wish thy destiny from mine dissever'd.
Fly, and I likewise fly; die, and I perish.

Ægis. Unfortunate Ægisthus!

Cly. Quickly, speak,

Can'st thou deny a day to so much love?

Ægis. And can'st thou ask it? What ought I to do?

Cly. Swear that thou wilt not leave the walls of Argos

Before to-morrow's dawn.

Ægis. Dost thou to this
Compel me?—with an oath I promise it.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Electra, Clytemnestra, Ægisthus.

Elec. The day is calm; the passion of the winds
And of the roaring billows is no more;
Our hope is now matured to certainty,
And every apprehension changed to joy.
The wish'd-for port to gain th' Argive prow
Advance; and at a distance one beholds
Their sail-yards tower, dense as a moving wood.
Mother, thy spouse is safe; my father lives.
I learn, that first he leap'd upon the strand,
And, with swift step, advances towards Argos:
Already he is almost at the gates,
And yet thou standest here.

Cly. Remember thou
Thy oath, Ægisthus.

Elec. Will Ægisthus, too,
Go forth with us to meet the king of kings?

Cly. 'Tis an unworthy triumph thus, O daughter,
With bitter words to wound the unfortunate.

Ægis. Perhaps to Electra's ears, Ægisthus' name
Is too offensive. With Ægisthus' heart
She is yet unacquainted.

Elec. With that heart.

Better am I acquainted than thou think'st.
Were it as well known to my blinded mother!

Cly. By the fierce discord of thy ancestors,
O daughter, thou art blinded. Of Ægisthus,
Save that he is the offspring of Thyestes,
Thou knowest nothing. Wherefore, then, disdain
To hear how pious, humble, and discreet,
He is, how worthy of a birth less guilty?
Conscious of that disgrace, erewhile he wished
To fly from Argos, and withdraw himself
From prosperous Agamemnon's haughty presence.

Elec. Why does he not go now? what keeps him
here?

Ægis. Be calm: I stay but for a little while.
The sight of one who never hated thee,
But whom so much thou hatest, by to-morrow
Shall be for ever from thine eyes removed.
I swore it to the queen a short time since,
And shall make good my words.

Cly. What a hard heart
Dost thou possess! Ah see, to the fierce rancour
Which all thy accents breathe, he nought opposes
But patience and humility.

Elec. I came not
His rare perfections to investigate.
My duty led me hither to acquaint thee
With Agamemnon's coming; and to tell thee
That all the Argives, of all ranks, all ages,
With joyful plaudits, festively, in crowds,
With emulous haste, rush forth to escort him hither.
Ere now I should have rush'd into the arms

Of my long-wished-for father ; but could I,
A daughter only, thus anticipate
A mother's footsteps ? Thus the first usurp
The fond embraces to a consort due ?
Why dost thou now delay ? Ah let us go,
'Twould be almost a crime to tarry longer.

Cly. Electra, thou dost know, and know too well,
The infirm state of my afflicted heart.
Canst thou exult thus to transfix that heart
With these repeated blows ?

Elec. The gods can witness
How much I love thee, mother ; how my breast
Bleeds with compassion for thee : love impels,
And pity likewise, to whate'er I do.
Would'st thou be found thus at Ægisthus' side
When first the king accosts thee ? Thou discloset,
By longer tarriance, what thou wouldest conceal.—
Let us depart.

Ægis. Ah ! lady, I beseech thee,
Go ; and persist not in thy own destruction.

Cly. I could not tremble as I tremble now,
If t' inevitable death I went.
Oh dreadful meeting ! moment of despair !
Whence can I summon such a fund of courage,
That 'twill not at his presence all forsake me.
He is my lord ; and though I have not wrong'd him,
Except in thought, I cannot, cannot see him,
Without, at the first glance, betraying all.
I cannot, and I will not, feign affection . . .
Oh day ! to me of woe unutterable !

Elec. Rather to us a day of consolation !
I feel that I shall now regain my mother.

Feel'st thou remorse? no longer art thou guilty.

Ægis. Wert thou e'er guilty? Thou hadst cause
to think

Thy husband dead; and, mistress of thy actions,
Thoughtest to give to me thy bridal hand—

Who can ascribe a thought like this to guilt?

He knows it not, except thou tell him of it.

Thou art not guilty; nor, when in his presence,

Hast cause to tremble. Thou wilt soon discover,

That his invulnerable breast retains,

For thy slain daughter, no compunctious pangs.

From his example learn to be secure.

Elec. Dar'st thou with thy mortiferous tongue as-
perse

The name of Agamemnon? Let us go.

Ah, mother, let this be the last advice

That thou wilt hear from him:

Cly. Thy oath, *Ægisthus*:

Remember thou hast sworn.

Ægis. One day remains.

Cly. Oh heavens! one day?...

Elec. Too long for one that's impious.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Ægisthus.

Ægis. Hate me, Electra, hate me; by *Ægisthus*
More fervently and fatally thou art hated:

And thou wilt learn, that my tremendous hate

In imprecations does not spend itself.

Ægisthus curses whom he hates... by death. ✕

At last, in all thy branches, thou art fallen

Within my power, abominable race!

With what regretful pungency I thought
 The angry waves had feasted on Atrides!
 Had it been so, oh how had I been robb'd
 By greedy billows of a mighty vengeance!
 'Tis true, that, by their death, Atrides' children,
 For Atreus' execrable deadly feast
 Had made atonement: thus, Thyestes, thus
 I had in part thy bloody thirst appeased.
 Thy vengeful and retributory oath
 In part I should have ratified... But what?
 Shall this revival of their sire redeem
 From death his offspring? Lo! the train here comes
 Of the victorious king. Hence, hence, and yield
 To the tumultuary, insensate joy
 Of the giddy people; glad they know not why.
 Your triumph shall be transient. I am here
 A stranger to all feasts but those of blood.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

People, Agamemnon, Electra, Clytemnestra, Soldiers.

Aga. At last I see the wish'd-for walls of Argos:
 This ground which now I tread is the loved spot
 Where once I wander'd with my infant feet.
 All that I see around me are my friends;
 My wife, my daughter, and my faithful people,
 And you, ye household gods, whom I at last
 Return to worship. What have I to wish?
 What does there now remain for me to hope?
 How long and tedious do ten years appear
 Spent in a foreign country, far from all
 The heart holds dear! With what profound delight,

After the labours of a bloody war,
Shall I repose? Oh home, beloved asylum,
Where peace alone awaits us, with what joy
Thee I revisit! But am I, alas!
The only one that tastes of comfort here?
My wife, my daughter, silently ye stand,
Fixing upon the ground unquietly
Your conscious eyes? Oh heaven, do ye not feel
A joy that equals mine, in being thus
Restored to my embrace?

Elec. Ah, honour'd father!

Cly. My lord . . . to-day we have felt vicissitudes
Too rapid and too opposite . . . Now driven
From hope to grief, and now from grief driven back
To unexpected joy . . . Ill can the heart
Emotions bear so sudden and discordant.

Elec. For thee till now we have trembled. Here
report

Spread of thee various and tremendous tidings,
To which the turbulent and stormy winds,
Which have for many days the ocean vex'd,
Made us yield credence; to ourselves a source
Of deep anxiety. At last thou art safe;
At last from Troy a conqueror thou return'st,
So much desired, and for so many months
So much desired in vain. Father, at last
Upon this hand, upon this hand of thine,
On which, before thou didst depart from hence,
I, but a child, infantine kisses printed;
I, now a woman grown, more fervently,
More reverently, the adult kiss impress.
That warlike hand, which made all Asia tremble,
Will not disdain a simple virgin's homage.

Ah no ! I feel assured, that, to the heart
Of my most tender father, to behold
Once more, to clasp his well-beloved daughter,
Matured in age, devoted to his will,
Will be a grateful spectacle, far more
Than vanquish'd kingdoms, and submissive monarchs.

Aga. Yes, daughter, dearer to me far than fame
Are the fond ties of blood ; ah ! could I be
As happy as a father and a husband
As I am as a warrior and a king !
But I reproach not you ; myself alone
And my hard destiny. Already heaven
Has robb'd me of one daughter : to complete
My measure of parental happiness
At my return, she only now was wanting.
But heaven forbids it, and I must divert
From the dire subject my regretful thoughts.
Electra, thou art left to me ; art left
To thy unhappy and afflicted mother.
How, as a fond companion, by her side,
Her only solace in my tedious absence,
Her endless tears, her anxious restlessness,
And all her sufferings, hast thou shared with her,
Thou tenderest of daughters ! How many days,
How many nights, in calling me to mind,
Have ye consumed together ! Likewise, I,
Amid the frequent fierce vicissitudes
Of military enterprise ; 'mid blood,
'Mid glory, and 'mid death, for ever saw
Your image present, your anxieties,
Your tears, conjectures, and inquietudes.
Oft in my helmet bonnetted I wept
In silence ; but, except the father, none

Were conscious of these tears. But now the time
For grief is at an end : and Clytemnestra,
From her dejected look, and tearful eye,
Alone I do not recognize.

Cly. I sad ? . . .

Elec. Joy, when it is excessive, overcomes
As much as grief. Father, allow her time
To calm her scatter'd spirits. She would fain
Say more than I can say, and hence says less.

Aga. Nor has she spoken to me of Orestes.

Cly. Orestes ?

Elec. Ah ! come to embrace him, father.

Aga. Heir of my throne, my only hope, Orestes,
Support and consolation of my life ;
Till in these arms a thousand times I've clasp'd thee,
I will not to these weary limbs allow
A moment's rest. . . My consort, let us go ;
Let us make haste t' embrace him : that dear son,
Of whom, though thou speak'st not, thou art the
mother ;

Him, whom I left an infant at the breast,
Quitting him with reluctance. . . Is he grown ?
What are his sports ? resembleth he his father ?
Hath he the seeds of future virtue in him ?
Do his eyes sparkle with a noble ardour,
If he beholds a brandish'd sword, or hears
Of glorious exploits, or heroic deeds ?

Cly. I cannot any longer check my tears !

Elec. Ah, father, come, and thou shalt see him : he
Expressly is thy image ; since from hence
Thou wentest, never have I quitted him.
Age of simplicity ! oft as he heard
His father named by us—" When, when," he cried,

“ Shall I behold him ?” Hearing afterwards
Of Troy, and arms, and foes, in thy defence,
With childish eagerness, he would aspire,
Equipp’d with arms, to brave thy enemies.

Aga. Ah ! say no more ; let us depart. Each in-
stant
Seems death to me that I delay to see him.

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Agamemnon, Electra.

Aga. Am I return’d to my own family ?
Or have I only changed my enemies
By change of place ? Electra, do thou calm
Thy father’s horrid doubts. Within my palace
I find a new reception ; to my consort
I am become a stranger ; yet, methinks,
She might ere now composure have regain’d.
Each word of her’s, each gesture, and each look,
Art, alienation, diffidence, constraint,
Successively announce. Am I become
To her so terrible, that, in her heart,
No genial feelings I can now excite,
Nothing but terror ? Where are they all gone,
Those chaste yet warm embraces ? whither flown
Those soft and artless accents ? those dear proofs
By thousands, and by thousands, of a love
Indubitable, which, with such a pang
I left—where are they ? which, with such a hope
So fond, so flatt’ring, and so dearly cherish’d,
I wish’d to see again ; ah ! tell me why,

Instead of finding them in more abundance,
They are all fled, no traces of them left ?

Elec. My king, my father, thou dost in thyself
Unite such attributes, that thou excitest
Reverence no less than love. Thy wife hath lived
A prey to sorrow for ten tedious years :
It is not possible, in one brief day,
To shake off grief confirm'd to habitude.
Her silence . . .

Aga. How much less was I at first
Confounded by that silence, than I now
Am by her studied artificial phrases.
How seldom is a genuine tenderness
Wrapt in the pomp of words ! There is a silence,
The child of love, more eloquent than speech,
Conveying meanings language cannot utter :
And there are gestures fraught with thought, and
feeling,

The heart's involuntary messengers :
But neither are her silence or her speech
Suggested by affection : that is certain.
What boots the glory now with which I'm laden ?
The laurels, 'mid such dire vicissitudes,
With so much bloodshed gain'd ; if I have lost
In gaining them—a blessing far more precious—
My peace of mind.

Elec. Ah banish such a thought !
As far as it depends on me, as far
As on my mother it depends, shalt thou
Enjoy among us perfect peace.

Aga. Yet whence
Is she become so different to herself ?
Ah tell me whence ? erewhile, when in my arms

She placed Orestes, didst thou then observe?
 While I was fill'd with transport, and ne'er thought
 That I enough had kiss'd him, or embraced him,
 Didst thou perchance behold her sympathize
 In my paternal joy? who would have thought
 The child was her's as much as it was mine?
 Our common hope, Orestes, the last pledge
 Of our affection; or I am much mistaken,
 Or these were not the unconcealable
 Spontaneous symptoms of a gladden'd heart,
 Nor the affections of a tender mother,
 Nor the endearments of a loving consort.

Elec. Somewhat 'tis true she's changed from what
 she was.

The sunshine of pure joy has ne'er return'd
 Since that tremendous day, when thou wert forced,
 As a condition of the general safety,
 To immolate thy daughter. Such a wound,
 If in a mother's heart 'tis ever heal'd,
 Is heal'd with difficulty; from her mind
 Ten years have not yet banish'd the remembrance
 Of the inevitable stratagem,
 At the same time compassionate and cruel,
 By which her daughter from her breast was torn.

Aga. Unhappy me! Does not my recollection
 Of that event suffice to punish me?
 Was I, than she, on that tremendous day
 Less wretched? Was not I as much a father
 As she a mother? But could I alone
 Deny her to the exasperated cries,
 The rabid turbulence, the menaces
 Of multitudinous and madden'd warriors;
 Who, from a cruel oracle, received

Potent incentives to their fiery rage ?
What could I do alone 'mid such a crowd
Of haughty kings, thirsting for fame and vengeance,
All equally impatient of restraint ?
Those barbarous kings all heard a father's groans,
Yet with that father not one shed a tear :
For when the angry gods in thunders speak,
Nature is silent, innocence in vain
Lifts up her voice : the gods alone are heard.

Elec. Ah trouble not with bitter recollections
This joyful day, the day of thy return !
If I spoke of it, 'twas but to diminish
The just amazement which arises in thee
At the constrain'd deportment of my mother.
Add to her former grief, that her sad mind,
Thrown back upon itself, in solitude
Has prey'd upon its powers : she has not had,
Except her children, any one to whom
She might impart, and thus assuage her grief.
One was too young, and I perhaps, though willing,
Was ill adapted for a comforter.
'Thou knowst, that bitterness of soul, when smother'd
Inwardly festers, and augments itself.
Thou know'st, that, to drag on in loneliness
A heavy heart, is death, not to joy only,
But e'en the power of joy, is life and being
To every phantasy of sickly minds.
Th' expecting thee so long, and every day
Trembling for thy security, thou see'st it,
How can she ever be what once she was ?
Pardon, I pray thee, the infirmities
Of an enfeebled mind ; all brooding thoughts

Drive from thee. Quickly, at thy cheering presence
The spectres of despondency will vanish.
Believe it, father, ere long thou wilt see
Her tenderness, her faith, her love, return.

Aga. At least it cheers me to indulge the hope.
How would it sooth me, if, without restraint,
She would unfold to me her inmost thoughts?
But, meanwhile, tell me, to what purpose comes,
Where I am king, the offspring of Thyestes?
What does he do here? What does he expect?
I only have learn'd here that he's in Argos.
It seems to me, as if, in naming him,
All felt embarrassment.

Elec. Of Atreus thou,
He of Thyestes is the offspring; hence
Springs this embarrassment? Ægisthus exiled,
Here came for an asylum; he has foes
E'en in his very brethren.

Aga. In that race
Fraternal hatred is hereditary;
Perchance the imprecations of my sire,
The anger of the gods, occasion this.
But that he should, near to the son of Atreus
Seek an asylum, not a little strange
To me appears. Already I've commanded
That he forthwith should come into my presence;
I wish to see him, from himself to learn
His present fortunes and his future projects.

Elec. Father, there is no doubt that he's unhappy;
But thou who dost discriminate at once
The various characters of men, wilt learn
Whether or not he merits to be so.

Aga. Behold, he comes. Who knows if he conceals

A base or noble heart, beneath a form
Of more than ordinary gracefulness.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Agamemnon, Electra, Ægisthus.

Ægis. Can I, devoid of fear, present myself
Before the glorious conqueror of Troy,
The sublime king of kings? I contemplate
The majesty, the splendour of a god
On thy august and all-commanding brow . . .
August, but at the same time merciful:
And from their thrones the gods oft bend their looks
On the unhappy. Such Ægisthus is.
Ægisthus, hitherto the sport of fortune,
Has common ancestors with thee: one blood
Runs in our veins, from whence I dare to seek,
Within these walls, if not relief, a shelter,
Which might avail, from my oppressive foes,
Who also are my brethren, to protect me.

Aga. Thou mak'st me shudder, when thou thus
recall'st

That we from one blood spring; 'twere surely better
For all of us to turn our thoughts from thence.
Thyestes' sons, by a decree of birth,
Are interchangeably condemn'd to hate;
But not condemn'd to chuse for an asylum
The court of Atreus. Hitherto, Ægisthus,
Thou wert, and still thou art, to me unknown;
I neither hate nor love thee; yet, though willing
To lay aside hereditary discord,

I cannot, without feeling in my breast,
I know not what, of strange and perplex'd feeling,
Behold the countenance, nor hear the voice,
Of one that is the offspring of Thyestes.

Ægis. That the magnanimous Atrides cannot,
E'en knows not how, to hate without disclosure,
This I well knew: a heart sublime like thine
Is inaccessible to base designs.

The valour thou, and not the enmities
Of thy forefathers, hast inherited.

Thou knowest how to punish, . . . or to pardon,
Who dares offend thee; but who, like myself,
Is wretched, and, to thee unknown, might claim
Thy pity, though he were a son of Troy.

Thee Greece selected, not by accident,
The leader of its lofty enterprise;
But deem'd thee monarch of all kings that were,
In courtesy, in valour, justice, faith.

Such I repute thee also, nor e'er deem'd
Myself more safe, than when beneath the shade
Of thy renown; nor did I recollect
That I was born the offspring of Thyestes,
But that I was the victim of misfortune.

It seem'd to me, that, in adversity,
My blood's defilement had been thoroughly cleansed:
And if thou shudder'dst at *Ægisthus* name,
I hoped that afterwards thou wouldest feel,
Within thy royal and generous breast,
Profound compassion for me, at the names
Of exile, wretched, mendicant, oppress'd.

Aga. And if I felt compassion, wouldest thou
From me endure it?

Ægis. Who am I, to dare

Despise a gift of thine ?

Aga. Thou ? Thou art sprung
From the most deadly enemy of my father :
Thou hatest me, and, more, art bound to hate me.
Nor can I blame thee for it ; our forefathers
Eternally have separated us ;
Not us alone ; our sons, and our sons' sons,
To all posterity. Thou knowest well,
The impious Thyestes did defile,
Ravish'd the spouse of Atreus. My father,
When he had slain them, at a horrid banquet,
Gorged the adulterer with his children's flesh.
Why should I utter more ? Legends of blood,
Ah, why recal thy dire vicissitudes ?
The bare recital stiffens me with horror.
I see in thee Thyestes and his furies.
Canst thou with other eyes contemplate me ?
Do not I represent to thee the image
Of sanguinary Atreus ? 'Mid these walls,
Which thou dost see stain'd with thy brothers' blood,
Oh, canst thou linger, nor in every vein
Throb with the recollection of the past ?

Ægis. Horrid, 'tis true, was the revenge of Atreus,
But it was just : Those children that Thyestes
Saw at the execrable banquet placed
Were fruit of incest. He their father was.
Yes ; but clandestinely the faithless spouse
Of the unavenged and too much injured Atreus
Bore them to him. The outrage was enormous,
But greater was the punishment. Brethren they
were,

'Tis true, but, to forget this sacred tie

Thyestes was the first, Atreus the second.
 It seems as if the anger of the heavens
 'Gainst me had not yet ceased : thy race, less guilty,
 Is crown'd with every blessing. Other brethren
 Thyestes gave to me ; and, not as I,
 Are these from incest sprung ; the wives of these
 I never ravish'd from them ; yet towards me,
 Far more than Atreus was, are they incensed.
 They have entirely driven me from the throne :
 And, more, to injure me, from me have taken
 My portion of hereditary wealth ;
 Nor that suffices : cruelly they seek,
 Having depriv'd me of my heritage,
 To take my life. Thou see'st, if, without cause,
 I seek for an asylum.

Aga. Thou hast cause
 To seek one, but thy choice is ill directed.

Ægis. Where'er I drag my feet, the infamy
 Of my paternal name and of my birth
 With me I drag ; but where should I less blush,
 When I give utterance to Thyestes' name,
 Than in the presence of the son of Atreus ?
 Thou, wert thou less elated by success ;
 Thou, wert thou friendless as Ægisthus is,
 The weight thou then would'st feel, feel all the hor-
 ror

Which is annex'd no less to a descent
 From Atreus than Thyestes. Do thou then
 Participate in my calamities.
 Atrides, act thou towards me, as thou would'st
 That others should towards thee, wert thou Ægis-
 thus.

Aga. Ægisthus I ? .. Know, whatso'er had been,

However adverse, desperate my fortune,
 I never would have turn'd my feet, no, never,
 To seek Thyestes' throne. I hear a voice,
 And such a voice proclaiming in my heart,
 That I should not place confidence in thee,
 That 'tis to pity closed. Yet, since thou wilt
 Solicit my compassion, which I am not
 Accustomed to refuse, I will endeavour,
 (Far as my name and power have influence
 In Greece,) in thy hereditary rights
 To re-instate thee. Meanwhile, go thou far
 From Argos. Near to thee I should drag on
 Days of anxiety, and restless nights.
 The son of Atreus and Thyestes' son
 One city cannot hold. Perhaps e'en within
 The boundaries of Greece, we still should be
 Too near each other.

Ægis. Dost thou drive me hence?
 What crime dost thou impute to me?

Aga. Thy father.

Ægis. Does that suffice?

Aga. It is too much. Go hence;
 Nor let to-morrow's dawn find thee in Argos.
 The help solicited thou shalt obtain,
 Provided that I hear thou hast obey'd me.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Agamemnon, Electra.

Aga. Electra, would'st thou think it? in his presence

I felt throughout my soul a shrinking back
 I never felt before.

Elec. Thou hast done well
Thus to dismiss him : never do I see him
Without a strange antipathy.

Aga. Our sires,
In characters of blood, in us have graven
An interchangeable and lasting hate.
Reason, perhaps, may teach me to suppress,
What neither time nor reason can destroy.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Electra.

Cly. Ah, why with fresh delays protract the hopes
Of thy expecting people ? Even now,
Upon the sacred altars, incense smokes.
Along the paths, engarlanded with flowers,
That to the temple lead, innumerable crowds,
Like waves, succeed each other, who, to heaven,
With loud acclaim, shout Agamemnon's praise.

Aga. I should, ere now, not only have indulged
The wishes of my people, but my own,
Had not Ægisthus, in a conference,
Detain'd me here, perhaps longer than I wished.

Cly. Ægisthus ?

Aga. Yes, Ægisthus. Tell me now,
Why heard I not from thee he was in Argos ?

Cly. My lord . . . I deem'd not he would find a
place
'Mid thy so many other cares.

Aga. Ægisthus
Is on his own account to me indifferent.
But he, thou knowest, from a blood descends
Fatal to mine. I do not now suspect

That he came here to injure me, (and could he?)
But yet it seems to me that his appearance
Is ill adapted to the festal homage
That waits on my return. I have commanded,
That ere to-morrow's dawn he goes from hence.
Meanwhile, let joy unmingled revel here.
Oh, consort, to the temple now I go,
Thus to propitiate the heavenly powers.
Ah! let the genial smile return to illumine
Thy countenance. Those smiles were once to me
Pledges of peace, and of beatitude;—
This heart can never rest till they return.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Electra, Clytemnestra.

Elec. Oh better consort of the best of kings!

Cly. Alas! I am betray'd: thou hast betray'd me.
Electra, didst thou thus observe thy promise?
Thou to the king revealedst that Ægisthus—
Or whence...

Elec. I never named him to the king;
Elsewhere he learn'd it. All are emulous
To gain his favour in a thousand ways.
All wish to make themselves important to him.
Rather should'st thou feel wonder, that he did not
Know this before.

Cly. But what imputes he to him?
Of what does he suspect him? Didst thou hear
Their conference? Why does he drive him hence?
And he, what did he answer? Did Atrides
Of me make mention to him?

Elec. Be composed,

Oh mother ; in the bosom of Atrides
Suspicion hath not enter'd. He ne'er dreams
Thou could'st betray him ; and from hence art thou
Bound never to betray him. To Ægisthus
His words were not those of an enemy.

Cly. But yet he's banish'd instantly from Argos.

Elec. Oh, happy queen ! thus from the brink thou
art snatch'd

Of a tremendous precipice at once,
Ere thou advancest farther.

Cly. He will go !

Elec. By his departure will thy secret be
Effectually conceal'd ; thou yet enjoyest
Th' entire affection of Atrides' heart.
More than aught else he wishes for thy love :
Impious detractors have not yet infected
His bosom with their poison ; all is yet
Untouch'd. But woe, if those base miscreants,
And wicked as they are base, but, for a moment,
Discover in your confidence a flaw !
They then will emulously tell him all . . .
Ah, mother ! . . . let compassion for thyself,
For us, and even for Ægisthus, move thee !
Banish'd from Argos, he will be secure
From the king's vengeance.

Cly. If I lose Ægisthus,
What have I then to shrink from ?

Elec. Infamy.

Cly. Leave me, Electra, to my terrible fate.

Elec. Ah no ! What hop'st thou ? what would'st
thou attempt ?

Cly. Thou innocent daughter of a guilty mother,
Leave me. Thou never more shalt hear me name

Ægisthus. Thee I'll not contaminate;
My poor, unhappy daughter, should not share
In my flagitious sighs.

Elec. Ah, mother!

Cly. Go.

Leave me to my own thoughts, and to the flame
That now devours me.—I insist upon it.

SCENE THE SIXTH.

Electra.

Elec. Unhappy me! . . . unhappy mother! . . . Ah
What a dire tempest gathers o'er our heads:
If ye, celestial powers, do not disperse it,
What will become of our devoted house?

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Ægisthus, Clytemnestra.

Ægis. Oh, queen, this is our last, our last farewell!

Alas! from whence I fain would have withdrawn,
I see myself proscribed. Yet do I not
Regret, remaining thus, to have obey'd thee.
At thy command, and for thy dear love's sake,
T' have suffer'd such an outrage, pleases me,
If thou accept the homage. But my heart
Feels a far different and severer grief,
In thus forsaking thee, and never more
To have the hope of seeing thee; no, never.

Cly. I feel, Ægisthus, that I well deserve

The most severe rebukes ; yet from thy lips
Since no rebuke I hear, thy wretchedness,
The horrors of thy unjust destiny,
Too keenly rend my self-accusing heart.
On my account thou suffer'st such disgrace ;
And I am ready, for thy sake, t' endure
Outrages, anguish, death, and, if need be,
E'en infamy itself. . . Now is the time
For action. Shall I ever leave thee ? Ah,
Think, while I breathe, that this can never be.

Ægis. Perhaps, then, thou art determined with
thyself

To ruin me. What else canst thou perform ?
Ah, cease ! it is in vain to contradict
The absolute will of monarch absolute.
Thou know'st his arguments consist in arms ;
Nor hears he other arguments from others.

Cly. We may, if not oppose, at least delude him :
Grateful the attempt would be. He has decreed
To-morrow's dawn for thy departure hence ;
And that to-morrow's dawn shall witness me
Companion of thy flight.

Ægis. Oh, heaven ! what say'st thou ?
Thou mak'st me tremble. Dear as is thy love,
So much, and more, thy fame to me is dear.
Ah no ! I ought not, nor will I permit it.
A day would come, though late, would come at last ;
A fatal day, when I should be constrain'd
To hear thee call—e'en to hear thee pronounce—
Ægisthus author of thy infamy.
Banishment, death, (towards which, from thee scarce
severed,
I rush with hasty steps,) would be to me

Less hard, than, wretched me ! ever to hear
Such dire recrimination from thy lips.

Cly. Thou only art the author of my life :
And shall I ever be compell'd to name thee
The author of my infamy ? e'en thou,
Who in my bosom dost a dagger plunge,
If thou possess the heart t' abandon me . . .

Ægis. Rather should I most wantonly immerge
That dagger in thy breast, if I constrain'd thee
To share my fate. Alas ! were it accomplish'd,
This meditated flight, who could secure us
From the avenging anger of Atrides ?
What refuge is there from his powerful arm ?
What shelter ? Was not Helen fugitive ?
Into his realm a powerful monarch's son
Conducted her ; but what did it avail
That the seducer had both arms and courage,
Ramparts and battlements ? By dint of force,
Within his very palace, and beneath
The eyes of his own father, at the foot
Of sacred altars, 'mid the cries, the tears,
The bloodshed, and the menace of his subjects,
Was not his mistress wrested from his arms,
And with her both his kingdom and his life ?
I, destitute of all alliances,
A wanderer, and an exile, what can I
Perform ? Thou see'st it clearly, thy design
Is in itself abortive. Thou alone
Would'st have defied the infamy in vain
Of ignominious flight : and I, possess'd
And destitute of thee at once, should gain
The eternal blot, the merited disgrace
Of a seducer. In this ill-judged flight,

If thou persist, this is the destiny
That stares us in the face.

Cly. Thou clearly see'st
The obstacles, and nothing else: true love
Ne'er condescended to be so discreet.

Ægis. Never, oh never, did true lover drag
To certain ruin the beloved object.
Suffer that I alone in peril be;
And thou wilt learn whether I condescend
To know, much less to care for obstacles.
I see most clearly, that at less than nothing
Thou valuest thy life: I see most clearly
Thy love is dearer to thee far than fame.
Yes, more, far more, than I deserve, thou lovest.
Ah! could I heal again thy wounded heart,
Heaven knows that at the risk of all I prize,
I fain would heal it! . . . all . . . all . . . would I do . . .
But cease to love thee: that I cannot do:
I can die easily; and now I wish it.
But if I am constrain'd, at a great risk,
To see thy fame and life exposed for me,
Oh, lady, chuse more certain means than flight.

Cly. More certain means? what other means are
left?

Ægis. To be a banish'd man . . . to fly . . . t' ex-
pire; . . .

These are the only means that I have left.
Thou, far from me, deprived of every hope
Of seeing me again, wilt, from thy heart,
Have quickly driven my image; great Atrides
Will wake a far superior passion there.
Thou, in his presence, many happy days
Wilt yet enjoy. These auspices may heaven

Confirm. Now can I not to thee evince
A surer proof of love than by my flight.
Terrible, hard, irrevocable proof.

Cly. If there be need of death, I'm fix'd to die.
But is there nothing left to try ere this?

Ægis. Another step, perhaps, e'en now remains . . .
But unbecoming . . .

Cly. And it is?

Ægis. Too cruel.

Cly. But certain?

Ægis. Certain, ah too much so!

Cly. How

Canst thou then hide it from me?

Ægis. How canst thou
Of me demand it?

Cly. What then may it be? . . .

I know not . . . speak: I am too far advanced . . .

I cannot now retract: perchance already

I am suspected by Atrides: perhaps

He has the right already to condemn me:

Hence do I feel constrain'd, e'en now, t' abhor him:

I cannot longer in his presence live:

I neither will nor dare. Do thou, *Ægisthus*,

Teach me, and be it whatsoe'er it may,

A means, by which I may withdraw myself

From him for ever.

Ægis. Thou withdraw thyself

From him? I have already said to thee

That now 'tis utterly impossible.

Cly. What other step remains for me to take?

Ægis. None.

Cly. Now, I understand thee. What a flash

Oh what a deadly, instantaneous flash

Of criminal conviction, rushes through
My obtuse mind? What throbbing turbulence
In every vein I feel!—I understand thee:—
The cruel remedy . . . the only remedy . . .
Is Agamemnon's life-blood.

Ægis. I am silent.

Cly. Yet silently thou askest for that blood.

Ægis. Nay, rather I forbid it. To our love,
And to thy life, (of mine I do not speak,)
His living is the only obstacle;
But yet thou knowest that his life is sacred:
To love, respect, defend it, thou art bound,
And I to tremble at it. Let us cease.
The hour advances now; my long discourse
Might give occasion to suspicious thoughts.—
At length receive *Ægisthus'* last farewell.

Cly. Ah! hear me . . . Agamemnon to our love . . .
And to thy life? . . . ah, yes, there are, besides him,
No other obstacles: too certainly
His life is death to us.

Ægis. Ah! do not heed
My words: they sprang from too much love.

Cly. And love
Reveal'd to me their meaning.

Ægis. Hast thou not
Thy mind o'erwhelm'd with horror?

Cly. Horror? . . . yes . . .
But to part from thee! . . .

Ægis. Would'st thou have the courage?

Cly. So vast my love it puts an end to fear.

Ægis. But the king lives surrounded by his friends.
What sword could find a passage to his heart?

Cly. What sword? . . .

Ægis. Here open violence were vain.

Cly. Yet . . . treachery . . .

Ægis. 'Tis true, he merits not
To be betrayed . . . Atrides . . . he who loves
His wife so well . . . he who, enchained from Troy,
In semblance of a slave in fetters, brought
Cassandra, whom he loves, to whom he is
Himself a slave.

Cly. What do I hear?

Ægis. Meanwhile
Expect, that when of thee his love is wearied,
He will divide with her his throne and bed :
Expect that, to thy many other wrongs,
Shame will be added ; and do thou alone
Not be exasperated at a deed
That rouses every Argive.

Cly. What said'st thou ? . . .
Cassandra doom'd to be my rival ? . . .

Ægis. So
Atrides wills.

Cly. Then let Atrides perish.

Ægis. How ? by what hand ?

Cly. By mine, this very night,
Within that bed which he expects to share
With this abhorred slave.

Ægis. Oh, heavens ! but think . . .

Cly. I am resolved . . .

Ægis. Should'st thou repent ? . . .

Cly. I do
That I have so long delayed.

Ægis. And yet . . .

Cly. I do it ;
I, e'en if thou wilt not. Shall I let thee,

Who only dost deserve my love, be dragg'd
To cruel death? And shall I let him live
Who cares not for my love? I swear to thee,
To-morrow, thou shalt be the king in Argos:
Nor shall my hand, nor shall my bosom tremble—
But who approaches?

Ægis. 'Tis Electra...

Cly. Ah!

Let us avoid her. Do thou trust in me.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Electra.

Elec. Ægisthus flies from me, and he does well:
But I behold that likewise from my sight
My mother seeks t' escape! Infatuate
And wretched mother! She could not resist
The blameable desire for the last time
To see Ægisthus. They have here, at length,
Conferr'd together... But Ægisthus seems
Too much elated, and too confident,
For one condemn'd to exile. She appear'd
Like one disturb'd in thought, but more possest
With anger and resentment, than with grief.
Oh heavens! who knows, to what that miscreant,
With his infernal arts, may have impell'd her!
To what extremities have wrought her up!...
Now, now, indeed, I tremble!... What misdeeds,
How black in kind, how manifold in number,
Do I behold!... Yet, if I speak, I kill
My mother:... If I am silent?...

SCENE THE THIRD.

Electra, Agamemnon.

Elec. Oh, my father,
Tell me, hast thou seen Clytemnestra?

Aga. I
Thought she already was in these apartments.
But she will soon be here.

Elec. I wish she may.

Aga. 'Tis certain I expect her here: she knows
That here I would awhile converse with her.

Elec. Father, Ægisthus lingers yet in Argos.

Aga. One entire day, thou know'st, I have allow'd
him:

'Tis almost spent: to-morrow he will go
Far from our sight for ever. But, what thought,
Oh daughter, thus disturbs thee? Restless looks
Thou castest round thee, and a mortal paleness
Steals o'er thy face! Whence this inquietude?
A thousand times upon thy faltering tongue
I have heard Ægisthus' name, and then thou pausest.

Elec. I know not why; yet do I wish him gone...
Believe me, that a night is a long space
For one that perhaps watches both place and time
For mischief; in the darkness of the night,
Guilt from its lurking place creeps forth, that shunn'd
The eye of day. My father, I conjure thee,
Ere the sun rises, banish him from Argos.

Aga. What dost thou say, Electra? Is he then
Hostile to me? Hast thou discovered this?
Dost thou suspect him of projecting plots?

Elec. No plots have I discover'd... yet... I think not.

But he's Thyestes' son. . . Upon my heart
There weighs an unknown, and a fatal presage.
Perchance my terrors are extravagant,
Yet they are not without a cause. Oh father,
Thou art call'd upon, believe me, not to scorn them,
Although I cannot, and perhaps know not how
To give them utterance. Meanwhile I retire
To guard the dear Orestes. Once more, father,
I do assure thee, that, to speed his absence,
Is to accelerate thy peace, and ours.]

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Agamemnon.

Aga. Fierce and implacable revenge of Atreus!
How dost thou live connatural with the blood
Of thy descendants! At Thyestes' name
They shudder. But ought I to be amazed,
If merely at the presence of Ægisthus
Troy's conqueror is dismay'd, that seeing him
A simple maid should fear?—If he has plotted
One nod of mine annihilates at once
Himself, and all his plots. But, is it fitting,
That, from suspicion only, I should steel
My heart against him? 'Twould be cruelty,
Thus his already intimated exile
For a few hours to hasten. If I tremble,
Lastly, is this his fault? Should he for this
Be punish'd?

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Agamemnon, Clytemnestra.

Aga. Come, consort, come; and from my heart
dispel,

For thou alone canst do it, every doubt,
Which, on that heart, Electra hath impress'd.

Cly. Electra? . . . Doubt? . . . What has she said
to thee? . . .

Oh heaven! . . . She loves thee so; . . . yet on this day
With false suggestions she oppresses thee? . . .

And yet, what doubts? . . .

Aga. Ægisthus . . .

Cly. What of him? . . .

Aga. Ægisthus, he, of whom thou ne'er to me,
As yet, hast spoken, seems to interrupt
Electra's comfort and tranquillity.

Cly. Hast thou not sentenced him to banishment?
What can Electra fear from him?

Aga. Ah, thou
Art not, as we are, of the blood of Atreus:
A stranger's mind cannot conceive the horror
That, in our race, Thyestes' race excites.
Yet to the terrors of a timid damsel
I do not yield, so as to change the hour
Fix'd for his banishment: I am content
To know that he is going to a distance.
I now shall have my heart relieved from care.
It now is time, full time, beloved consort,
That thou unfoldest to me the deep grief,
That weighs upon thy heart, and which I read,
In spite of all thy efforts, on thy face.

If not to me, to whom wilt thou reveal it?
 If I be the occasion of thy grief,
 Who better than myself can mitigate,
 Or expiate it, or divide it with thee? . . .
 Oh heaven! but thou art silent? From the earth
 Thine eyes dost never raise? Immoveably,
 Suffused with tears, they're fix'd. . . Alas! what thou,
 Electra saidst to me was too, too true.

Cly. Too true? . . . Electra? . . . Did she speak of
 me? . . .

Dost thou believe her?

Aga. Yes, she has, to me,
 Betray'd thee; and she has reveal'd to me
 The fountain of thy grief.

Cly. Oh heaven! . . . Perchance
 She has described my faith toward thee as dubious? . .
 I clearly see it all; Electra always
 Little regarded me.

Aga. Thou art mistaken.
 She spoke to me, of thee, as it behoved
 A duteous daughter of a much-loved mother:
 If otherwise, should I have listen'd to her?

Cly. What did she say then?

Aga. What, without a blush,
 Thou should'st have told me of thine own accord:
 That bitter recollections, in thy heart,
 Of thy devoted daughter haunt thee yet.

Cly. Of Iphigenia? . . . Now I breathe. . . —Ah, ye
 That day will ever more be fatal to me. . .

Aga. What can I say, that thou already know'st
 not?

In every heart, except in thine, I find
 Pity for my misfortunes: but if tears,

Maternal tears, or bitterest reproach,
Could mitigate thy unconsumed affliction,
In tears, or in recriminating words,
Why not indulge? Though I deserve it not,
I would endure it. Why not weep with me?
Dost thou despise my tears? Thou knowest well
I were not able to refrain from them,
At the remembrance of my luckless daughter.
Further, oh consort, if thou hatest me,
Ah tell me so: avow'd dissatisfaction
Is more endurable than feign'd regard.

Cly. Perchance the cause that in thine eyes I seem
So much more alter'd than I am, arises
From thy not being what thou wert before.
I will e'en speak it out: perchance Cassandra,
Ah, yes, Cassandra, is the cause, whence I
Am now less acceptable to Atrides. . .

Aga. Oh heaven! Cassandra? Consort, what dost
thou

Impute to me? and canst thou think this true?
When the best spoils among us were divided
Of ravaged Troy, to me th' illustrious damsel,
Deprived by the victorious Grecian sword
Of parents and of country, was awarded.
The accustom'd, and the fatal, law of conquest,
Ordain'd, that, bound in fetters, I should bring her
With me to Argos; an affecting instance
Of the uncertainty of human greatness.
I pity, it is true, Cassandra's fate,
But thee alone I love. Know'st thou not this?
And as a proof of this, to thee I yield
The royal captive: if it be thy will,
Withdraw her from my sight, and exercise,

Over her lot, unlimited controul.
Thee I conjure alone to recollect
That she's the wretched daughter of a king
Once powerful; that to treat her with disdain,
Would be unworthy of thy lofty station.

Cly. Dost thou not love her? . . . wretched me . . .
oh heaven!

And dost thou yet so faithfully love me?
But can I e'er consent to take from thee
Thy lawful spoil? Ah! no; she's thine by right:
She has already cost thee too much toil,
And too much jeopardy, and too much blood.

Aga. What boots it to insinuate, and speak not?
Rather disburthen by severe rebukes
Thy pent-up bitterness, than thus convey
Unutter'd, yet intelligible meanings.
If it be such a thought that troubles thee,
And in thy heart if jealous phantasies
Find a reception, thy inquietudes
Are by the roots effectually torn up.
Come, consort, come, and be by thine own eyes
Persuaded, that Cassandra, in thy palace,
Can be alone thy first obedient handmaid.

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Clytemnestra.

Cly. Behold the hour.—Now Agamemnon lies
Buried in sleep. . . And shall he never more
Unclose his eye-lids to the cheerful light?
This my right hand, the pledge of chaste affection,

Pledge of connubial faith, now arms itself
His death t' accomplish? . . . This I have sworn to do?
Yes, too irrevocably sworn: . . . Alas! . . .
Now is the time to consummate my oath. . .
My feet, my heart, my hands, throughout I tremble:
What do I undertake? . . What have I promised? . .
Oh! how in me hath all my fortitude
At the departure of Ægisthus vanish'd!
I see alone th' immense atrocity
Of my enormous crime: I see alone
The blood-besprinkled spectre of Atrides. . .
Ah what a sight! . . . Crimes I impute in vain
To thee. Ah! no, thou lovest not Cassandra:
Far more than I deserve thou lovest me;
And me alone. The smallest crime thou hast not,
Except that thou art my husband. Ah Atrides!
And shalt thou from the arms of quiet sleep,
By me, be hurried to the arms of death? . . .
Where shall I hide me when the deed is done? . . .
Oh treason! . . . Can I ever hope again
For peace? Oh what a horrid life of tears,
Of rage, and of remorse? . . How can Ægisthus,
In an ensanguined bed, and at the side
Of an atrocious, parricidal spouse,
Dare to repose? Will he not start to find
A murderer there? And tremble for his safety?—
Of all my shame, and all my wretchedness,
Abominable instrument, far, far
From me, thou instrument of death, oh far!
My lover I will lose, and lose with him
My life: but such a hero shall not fall,
Murder'd by me. Thou ornament of Greece,
Terror of Asia, live t' enjoy thy fame;

For thy beloved children . . . and a wife
 More worthy of thy love.—What do I hear? . . .
 What stealing footsteps? . . . Who could venture hi-
 ther
 At this dead hour of night? . . . Ægisthus? . . . Ah!
 All is then lost! . . .

SCENE THE SECOND.

Ægisthus, Clytemnestra.

Ægis. Hast thou perform'd the deed?

Cly. Ægisthus . . .

Ægis. What do I behold? Oh, lady,
 What dost thou here, dissolved in useless tears?
 Tears are unprofitable now, and vain,
 And they may cost us dear.

Cly. Thou here? . . . but how?
 Wretch that I am! what have I promised thee?
 What impious counsel? . . .

Ægis. Was not thine this counsel?
 Love gave it thee, and fear recants it.—Now,
 Since thou art repentant, I am satisfied;
 Soothed by reflecting that thou art not guilty,
 I shall at least expire. To thee I said
 How difficult the enterprize would be;
 But thou, depending, more than it became thee,
 On that, which is not in thee, virile courage,
 Daredst thyself thy own unwarlike hand
 For such a blow select. May heaven permit,
 That the mere project of a deed like this,
 May not be fatal to thee! I by stealth,
 Protected by the darkness, hither came,
 And I hope unobserved. I was constrain'd

To announce to thee, myself, that now my life
Is irrecoverably forfeited
To the king's vengeance. . .

Cly. What is this I hear?
Whence didst thou learn it?

Ægis. More than he would wish,
Atrides hath discover'd of our love;
And I already from him have received
A strict command not to depart from Argos.
And further, I am summon'd to his presence
Soon as to-morrow dawns. Thou art convinced
That such a conference to me is death.
But fear not; for I will all means contrive
To draw the blame entirely on myself.

Cly. What do I hear? Atrides knows it all?

Ægis. He knows too much. I have but one choice
left:

It will be best for me to evade by death,
By self-inflicted death, this perilous inquest.
I save thy honour thus, and free myself
From an opprobrious end. I hither came
To give thee my last warning, and to take
My last farewell. . . Oh live, and may thy fame
Live with thee, unimpeach'd! Pity no more,
Whom pity cannot aid: if I'm allow'd
By my own hand, for thy sake, to expire,
I am supremely blest.

Cly. Alas! . . . *Ægisthus* . . .
What a tumultuary rage I feel
Within my bosom, when I hear thee speak! . . .
And is it true? . . . Thy death? . . .

Ægis. 'Tis more than certain . . .

Cly. And I am thy murderer! . . .

Ægis. I desire thy safety.

Cly. What beckoning fury from Avernus' shore
Accompanies thy steps? Oh, I had died,
If I had never seen thee more, of grief;
But guiltless I had died: spite of myself,
Now, by thy presence, I already am
Again impell'd to this tremendous crime. . .
An anguish, an unutterable anguish,
Lives in my bones; in every fibre lives.
And can it be, that this alone can save thee?
But who reveal'd our love?

Ægis. To speak of thee,
Who, but Electra, to her father, dare?
Who, to the monarch, breathe thy name, but she?
Thy impious daughter in thy bosom thrusts
The fatal sword; and ere she takes thy life
Would rob thee of thy honour.

Cly. And ought I
This to believe? . . . Alas!

Ægis. Believe it thou
On the authority of my sword, if thou
Believest it not on mine. Ah, may I die
At least in time . . .

Cly. Oh heaven! what wouldst thou do?
Sheathe, I command thee, sheathe that fatal sword.
Oh night of horrors! . . . hear me . . . perhaps Atrides
Has not resolved.

Ægis. What boots this hesitation?
Atrides injured, and Atrides king,
Meditates nothing in his haughty mind
But blood and vengeance. Certain is my death;
Thine is uncertain: but reflect, oh queen,
To what thou art destined, if he spare thy life.

And were I seen to enter here alone,
And at so late an hour . . . Alas, what fears
Harrow my bosom when I think on thee !
Soon will the dawn of day deliver thee
From racking doubt : that dawn I ne'er shall see ;
I am resolved to die. Farewell . . . for ever !

Cly. Stay, stay . . . Thou shalt not die.

Ægis. By no man's hand,
Assuredly, except my own ; or thine,
If so thou wilt. Ah, perpetrate the deed ;
Kill me, and drag me, palpitating yet,
Before thy austere judge : my blood will be
A glorious acquittance.

Cly. Maddening thought !
Wretch that I am ! . . . Shall I be thy assassin ?

Ægis. Shame on thy hand, that cannot either kill
Who most adores thee, or who most detests thee.
Mine then must serve . . .

Cly. Ah ! no . . .

Ægis. Dost thou desire
Me, or Atrides, dead ?

Cly. Ah ! what a choice !

Ægis. Thou art compell'd to chuse.

Cly. I inflict death ? . . .

Ægis. Or death receive ; when thou hast witness'd mine.

Cly. Ah, then the crime is too inevitable !

Ægis. The time now presses.

Cly. But the courage, . . . strength ? . . .

Ægis. Strength, courage, all, will love impart to thee.

Cly. Must I then with this trembling hand of mine
Plunge . . . in my husband's heart . . . the sword ?

Ægis. The blows
Thou wilt redouble with a steady hand,
In the hard heart of him who slew thy daughter.

Cly. Far . . . from my hand . . . I hurl'd the sword
... in anguish . . .

Ægis. Behold a sword, and of another temper :
The clotted blood-drops of Thyestes' sons
Still stiffen on its frame. Do not delay
To furbish it once more in th' impious blood
Of Atreus ; be quick : there now remain
But a few moments ; go. If awkwardly
The blow thou aimest, or if thou should'st be
Again repentant, lady, ere thou givest it,
Do not thou any more toward these apartments
Thy footsteps turn : by my own hands destroy'd,
Here would'st thou find me in a sea of blood
Immersed . . . Ah go, and tremble not ; be bold,
Enter, and save us by his death.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Ægisthus, Agamemnon within.

Ægis. Come forth,
Thyestes, from profound Avernus ; come,
Now is the time : within this palace now
Display thy horrible shade. A copious banquet
Of blood is now prepared for thee, enjoy it :
Already o'er the heart of thy foe's son
Hangs the suspended sword ; now, now he feels it :
An impious consort grasps it : it was fitting
That she, not I, did this : so much more sweet
To thee will be the vengeance, as the crime
Is more atrocious. An attentive ear

Lend to the dire catastrophe with me ;
Doubt not she will accomplish it : disdain,
Love, terror, to the necessary crime
Compel the impious lady.

Aga. Traitress ! Ah ! . . .
My wife ? . . . Oh heaven . . . I die . . . ah trait'rous
deed ! . . .

Ægis. Die thou, yes, die. And thou redouble,
lady,
The blows redouble ; all the weapon hide
Within his heart ; shed, to the latest drop,
The blood of that fell miscreant : in our blood
He would have bathed his hands.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Clytemnestra, Ægisthus.

Cly. What have I done ? . . .
Where am I ? . . .

Ægis. Hast thou slain the tyrant ? Now
At length thou art worthy of me.

Cly. See, with blood
The dagger drops ; . . . my hands, my face, my gar-
ments,
All, all are blood . . . Ah, for a deed like this
What vengeance shall be wreak'd ? . . . I see already,
Already to my breast that very sword
I see hurl'd back . . . and by what hand ! . . . I freeze . . .
I faint . . . I shudder . . . I dissolve with horror !
My strength . . . my utterance . . . fail me . . . where
am I ? . . .

What have I done ? . . . Alas ! . . .

Ægis. Tremendous cries

Resound on every side throughout the palace :
'Tis time to shew the Argives what I am,
And reap the harvest of my long endurance.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Electra, Ægisthus, Clytemnestra.

Elec. It still remains for thee to murder me,
Thou impious, vile assassin of my father...
But what do I behold? Oh heaven! my mother?
Flagitious lady, dost thou grasp the sword?
Did'st thou commit the murder?

Ægis. Hold thy peace.
Stop not my path thus; quickly I return;
Tremble: for now I am the King of Argos.
Far more important is it that I kill
Orestes, than Electra.

SCENE THE SIXTH.

Clytemnestra, Electra.

Cly. Oh heaven! ... Orestes? ...
Ægisthus, now I know thee... ✕

Elec. Give it me:
Give me that sword...

Cly. Ægisthus! ... stop ... wilt thou
Murder my son? ... First shalt thou murder me.

SCENE THE SEVENTH.

Electra.

Elec. Oh night! ... Oh father! ... Ah, it was your
deed,

Ye gods, this thought of mine to place Orestes
In safety first. Thou wilt not find him, traitor.
Ah live, Orestes, live; and I will keep
This impious sword for thy adult right hand.
The day, I hope, will come, when I in Argos
Shall see thee, the avenger of thy father.

ORESTES.

A TRAGEDY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ÆGISTHUS.

ELECTRA.

ORESTES.

Soldiers.

PYLADES.

Followers of Orestes and

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Pylades.

SCENE,—The Palace in Argos.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Electra.

Elec. Oh fatal, horrible, atrocious night,
Oh night, for ever present to my thoughts !
Now, for two lustres, every year, I've witness'd,
Pall'd in ensanguined darkness, thy return ;
Yet, 'tis not shed, the expiatory blood,
The blood that thou requirest. Oh remembrance !
Oh Agamemnon, oh my wretched father !
Within these thresholds I beheld thee slain ;
And by what hand ? To his most sacred tomb,
Oh night, thou guidest me, by all unseen ;
Except, indeed, that, ere to-morrow dawn,
Ægisthus do not come to interrupt
The tears, which I disconsolately bring

W. 2004
W. 2004
W. 2004
W. 2004
W. 2004

In annual tribute to his sacred ashes !
 The only tribute which I now can give thee
 Of past affection, and the only pledge
 Of hope, not yet quite banish'd from my bosom,
 Of possible revenge. Ah ! yes : I swear,
 If yet I live in Argos, in this palace,
 Near a flagitious mother, and the slave
 Of an Ægisthus, it is that revenge,
 That possible revenge, and nothing else,
 That gives me strength t' endure the life I lead.
 Orestes yet, though far from Argos, lives.
 'Twas I that saved thee, brother ; and for thee
 I save myself, until the day arise,
 When thou shalt shed upon my father's tomb,
 Not tears, but life-blood of an enemy.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Clytemnestra, Electra.

Cly. Daughter.

Elec. What voice is that ? Oh heaven ! comest thou ?

Cly. Ah ! fly not from me, daughter ; I would share
 With thee the sacred task ; in vain Ægisthus
 Prohibits me ; he will not know it. Come ;
 Let us together to the tomb repair.

Elec. Of whom ?

Cly. Of . . . thy . . . unhappy . . . father.

Elec. Ah !

Wherefore not say of thy unhappy consort ?
 Thou darest not, and well that fear becomes thee.
 But how darest thou thy footsteps thither bend,
 Still with his blood defiled ?

Cly. Ten years are past
Since that atrocious night ; ten years I have wept
Unceasingly my guilt.

Elec. What length of time
Can e'er suffice t' atone for such a fault ?
E'en were thy tears eternal, that were nothing.
Dost thou not see it ? On these horrid walls
Still the coagulated blood-drops stand
Which thou hast shed : ah fly ; at sight of thee,
Behold, it liquifies, and reddens. Fly,
Oh thou, whom I ne'er can, nor ought to call
My mother : go ; return to th' impious bed
Of th' infamous Ægisthus. At his side W. S.
His consort stand ; nor further do advance
To trouble Agamemnon's quiet relics.
E'en now his terrible, indignant shade
Rises against us, and repels thee back.

Cly. Thou makest me shudder . . . once thou lovedst
me . . .

Oh daughter ! . . . oh remorse ! . . . oh agony !
Think'st thou I can be happy with Ægisthus ?

[*Elec.* Happy ? Deservest thou to be happy ? Heaven
By an indissoluble tie has join'd

Vice, infamy, and wretchedness together.
Thy agony in fate's eternal archives
Hath been from all eternity engraved.
Thou only provest yet the first faint symptoms
Of future torment : near the dreary waves
Of black Cocytus 'tis reserved for thee
In all its plenitude. There art thou doom'd
To bear the menacing and angry looks
Of thy slain consort : there wilt thou behold,
On thy arrival, the indignant spectres

Of thy forefathers shudder; thou wilt hear
The inexorable judge of hell regret,
That to thy crime no punishment is equal.

Cly. Wretch that I am! What can I ask for? . . .
pity . . .

No, that I merit not . . . and yet, oh daughter,
Could'st thou but see the anguish of my heart . . .
But who, without abhorrence, could explore
The deep recesses of a heart, like mine,
Contaminate with so much infamy?
I cannot blame thy hatred, or thy rage.
In life, already, all the pangs I prove
Of baleful Erebus. Scarce had the blow
Been by my hand accomplish'd, ere repentance,
Swift, but too late, tremendously assail'd me.
E'en from that moment, the ensanguined spectre
Both day and night before my blasted eyes
Horribly rises. Wheresoe'er I move,
Preceding me, the phantom I behold
Trailing along my desolated path
A track of sable blood: 'tis on my bed;
'Tis on my throne; and worse, 'tis in my heart:
If, as it seldom happens, I should close,
Upon my restless couch, my weary lids,
The spectre haunts my dreams; and I behold him
Plunge in the wide wounds of his bleeding breast
His rabid hands, then wildly draw them forth
Dropping with gore, and in a threatening posture,
With fingers clench'd, wring them before my face.
To horrid nights succeed more horrid days:
x Thus I exist in a protracted death.—
Oh daughter, (for thou art my daughter still,
Whate'er I be) weep'st not at pangs like these?

Elec. I weep, . . . ah yes . . . I weep—But tell me, mother,

Dost thou not yet enjoy the usurp'd throne ?
Does not Ægisthus with thee also reap
The common harvest of your common crime ?
With thee I should not weep ; far less should I
Yield credence to thy tears. Go to Ægisthus ;
Leave me alone t' accomplish my design. *as*

Cly. Oh daughter, hear me ; stay a moment longer ;
I am enough distress'd. [I hate myself
More than thou hatest me.] Too late I knew
Ægisthus . . . Ah ! . . . What do I say ? Atrides
Scarce was no more, ere fully I discover'd
The baseness of his soul ; yet still I loved him.
I felt, and still I feel, the speechless conflict
Of a remorseful love . . . Remorse, and love,
Unnatural pair, of me alone ye are worthy ! . . .
What recompence Ægisthus renders me
For my delinquency, I clearly see :
I see contempt in spurious love conceal'd.
But so much am I fall'n, [that what atonement
Can I now offer for my turpitude,
That is not criminal ?

Elec. A lofty death] *←* *She wants make up for her crime but no*
Atones for every crime. But, since thou hast not
The weapon, reeking with thy husband's blood,
Against thy bosom hurl'd ; since toward thyself
Thy parricidal arm hath seem'd to lose
Its wonted intrepidity ; ah, why
Hast thou not turn'd, or turn'st thou not, thy sword
Against the bosom of that miscreant,
Who takes from thee thy honour, peace, and fame,
And his paternal rights from thy Orestes ? *21*

Cly. Orestes? . . . when I hear that name pronounced,

In every vein my blood congeals.

Elec. (My blood

Boils in each vein) hearing Orestes' name.

Thou feelest now, as such a mother should,

A mother's love. But yet Orestes lives. ✕

Cly. And may the gods grant him a lengthen'd life.

Ah, may he never his incautious feet

Toward Argos turn. I am a wretched mother ;

Even for ever have I from myself

Banish'd my son. Alas ! I am compell'd,

E'en in proportion as I love him, now

To supplicate the gods, that they no more

May bring him in my sight.

Elec. I feel a love

Quite opposite to thine. For his return

I wish, and weary heaven with prayers to grant it ;

And in the hope of that return I live.

✕ I trust, that one day he will dare to come,

(As should the son of murder'd Agamemnon.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Ægisthus, Clytemnestra, Electra.

Ægis. Doth then the entire day seem short, oh queen,

For thy afflictions ? Ere the morning's dawn

To fresh regrets thou risest ? Yield the past

To merited oblivion ; and consent,

By being so thyself, to make me happy.

Cly. Thou wishedst but to reign, and now thou reign'st.

Handwritten notes:
Ægisthus, Clytemnestra, Electra.
Ægis. Doth then the entire day seem short, oh queen,
For thy afflictions? Ere the morning's dawn
To fresh regrets thou risest? Yield the past
To merited oblivion; and consent,
By being so thyself, to make me happy.
Cly. Thou wishedst but to reign, and now thou reign'st.

Now, what solicitude canst feel for me
Or for my grief? Eternal is that grief,
And that thou knowest.

Ægis. I know well what fount
Thus ministers to thee eternal tears.
Thou would'st, at all events, preserve Electra;
With thy solicitations I complied
For thy misfortune and my own. Henceforth
That aspect of insufferable grief
I from thine eyes will take away: I will
Henceforth the palace gladden; and from thence,
With her, will banish tears.

Elec. Drive me away:
Still ever will this palace, where thou dwell'st,
Be the abode of tears, What other voice,
Save that of lamentation, can be heard
Where an Ægisthus reigns? But it must give
Exquisite pleasure to Thyestes' son
To see the progeny of Atreus weep.

Cly. Daughter . . . he is my husband. Ah, reflect,
Ægisthus, that she is my daughter.

Ægis. She?
She is the daughter of Atrides.

Elec. He?
He is Atrides' murderer.

Cly. Electra! . . .
Ægisthus, pity . . . dost thou see that tomb,
That horrible tomb . . . and art not satisfied?

Ægis. Lady, be more consistent with thyself.
Say, whose hand laid Atrides in that tomb?

Cly. Fatal rebuke! Can more be wanting now
To fill the measure of my bitterness?
The very instigator to it, now,

Upbraids me for the crime.

Elec. Oh new delight!

Oh sole delight, with which, for ten years past,
My heart has been refresh'd! I see you both
A prey to hatred and remorse. At length
I the retributory transports hear
Of a flagitious love: at length are fled
All your illusions; thoroughly ye know
Each other. May contempt impel to hate,
And hate to further blood.

Cly. Oh horrible,
But merited denunciatory curse!
Oh heaven! ... Ah! ... daughter.

Ægis. From thyself alone
Arises all our discord. Such a daughter
Well may a mother lose, nor feel herself
More childless than before. I might reclaim
That which I weakly granted to her prayers;
But I am not accustomed to reclaim
That which I once have given; not to see thee
Suffices to our peace. To-day, I yield thee
To the most abject of my slaves as wife.
With him thou shalt be banish'd: and shall bring
him,

Amid the infamy of squalid want,
Instead of dowry, thy eternal tears.

Elec. Speak'st thou of other infamy than thine?
What slave of thine is vile compared with thee?
Or more degraded, what?

Ægis. Depart.

Elec. I know

That thou hast saved my life t' increase my pangs.

But, come what may come, this my hand, which
heaven

Perhaps dooms to lofty purposes...

Ægis. Now go ;

Once more I say it.

Cly. Be thou silent now...

Oh daughter... go, I pray thee...

Elec. Severed from you, there is no punishment
X Which equals the annoyance of your presence.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Ægisthus, Clytemnestra.

Cly. To hear severe rebukes from every tongue,
And merit them!... (Oh life! to thee what death
Can ever be compared!)

Ægis. Oft have I told thee,
That while Electra in our presence stays
We ne'er can breathe in peace. 'Tis time, high time
X That she were slain: the safety of the state,
Thy peace and mine, demand it: furthermore,
By her offensive pride she stands condemn'd.
But still thy tears entreat me to absolve her.
Cease then to oppose her banishment: I will it:
And it were utterly in vain for thee
To seek t' oppose that will.

Cly. Oft have I told thee,
Whatever be Electra's destiny,
Never 'twixt us, oh never, can be peace:
('Mid apprehension thou,) I 'mid remorse;
In guilty terrors both, we shall drag on
A horrid apprehensive life for ever.

Is there another hope? *

Ægis. I ne'er look back :
I of the future think : I ne'er can be
Happy, while of Atrides' seed remains.
Orestes lives : in him, with years, matures
Hatred towards us : he lives, and lives alone
On the dire project of ferocious vengeance.

Cly. Wretched ! he lives ; but far from us, unknown,

Helpless, obscure.—Ah cruel ! to a mother
Canst thou lament thus, that her son yet lives ?

Ægis. Yes, to a mother, who has slain her husband,

Thus I may well lament. *That* to our love —
Thou sacrificedst ; should'st thou not then *this*
Equally to my safety sacrifice ?

Cly. Oh thou, ne'er satisfied with blood and crimes ! . . .

Thou hast already caught me in the snare
Of feigned regard : thy cruel manners since
Too well have proved this truth ! Still in my breast,
E'en yet a flame too strong, and too sincere,
I cherish ; and thou knowest this too well !
Hence may'st thou judge, if I can fail to love
An innocent and only son. What heart
Is there so hard as not to weep his lot ?

Ægis. Thou who with one blow two did'st immolate.

The self-same sword cut off the father's life,
And graved, in sable characters of blood,
The son's death-warrant.—My procrastination,
Fortune, the subtle foresight of Electra,
Have saved Orestes. But what matters that ?

Darest thou proclaim the innocence of a son,
Whose father thou hast slain, whose throne usurped?

Cly. Oh words of blood! . . . Oh son, deprived of
all,

Nothing thou givest him, who, of that all
Thus robb'd thee, (if thou givest not thy life.)?

Ægis. And, tell me, while he lives, are they se-
cure

Who triumph in his spoils? Over thy head
His sword for ever hangs. Son of Atrides,
The only branch of that flagitious race,
Uniting every crime, (his fierce revenge
Would not alone with my blood be appeased.)
Anxiety for thee, more than myself,
Weighs on my bosom when I think of him.
Thou heard'st the dreadful and oracular voice,
Predicting, that Orestes would become
The murderer of his parents? Wretched mother,
That voice belongs to thee; whene'er the power
Is mine, I ought t' accelerate his death,
Thou to endure it silently.

Cly. Alas! . . .

My blood

Ægis. Orestes is not of thy blood;
He is the impure remnant of the blood
Of Atreus: a blood to every crime
Predestined. Thou his father hast beheld,
By impious ambition, hurried on;
His daughter, on the altar, immolate.
Orestes, treading in his father's steps,
Atrides' son, will sacrifice his mother.

7 Mother too blind, and too compassionate!
That son now holds himself prepared to slay thee:

Behold him; tremble . . .

Cly. To avenge his father,
Suffer him, then, to pierce this guilty breast.
Another greater crime, if such there be,
Perhaps should atone for mine. But thou, *Ægisthus*,
Whatever destiny may threaten me,
I do conjure thee, by the injured blood
Of *Agamemnon*, do not thou attempt
To plot against *Orestes*. Far from us,
And exiled, he may live; but let him live.
Orestes would not dare to turn his steps
Towards his native country; if he came,
My breast should shield him from thy violence.
But if he came, 'tis heaven that brings him hither;
And who avails 'gainst heaven? What doubt re-
mains?

[I a predestinated victim am.]

Ægis. Awhile refrain from tears. *Orestes* lives:
And I but faintly hope that in my power
He ever will be found. But if the day
Should e'er arrive, when I indeed suffice
To consummate a necessary deed,
Which thou in vain call'st criminal, that day
Thou shalt, if so thou wilt, resume thy tears.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Orestes, Pylades.

Ores. This is my palace, *Pylades*.—Oh joy!
Beloved *Pylades*, embrace me; now
The day at length arises, when I may
Relieve thee from thy long calamities

Endured in my behalf.

Py. Love me, Orestes;
Listen to my advice ; this, this alone
Is the relief that for myself I ask.

Ores. At last we are arrived.—Here reigns *Ægis-*
thus ;

Here Agamemnon fell by murderous hands.
This palace, though I left it but a child,
Is yet familiar to me. Just heaven in time
Conducts me hither. Twice five years have past,
This very night, have past, since, slain by treachery,
My father made these palace walls resound
With dolorous cries. Oh ! well I recollect it.
Electra, swiftly through this very court,
Carried me thither, where, with pitying arms,
Strophius received me, who, no less to me
Than to thyself, has proved himself a father.
And he, all trembling, through that secret gate
Fled with me ; and behind me there resounded
A long confusion of lamenting voices,
Which made me weep, and shriek aloud, and tremble,
I knew not why. Strophius, who wept himself,
Smothering my howlings with his hand, embraced
me,

And with his bitter tears bedewed my face ;
He to the solitary shore, where late
We landed, meanwhile with his burden came,
And to the prosp'rous winds unreef'd his sails.
In manhood I return, at length in manhood ;
Of hope, of courage, anger, and revenge,
Full I return, whence I departed once,
Weeping, a helpless child.

Py. Here reigns *Ægisthus* ;

And here, with fearless voice, thou speak'st of vengeance?

Incautious! Dost thou such beginning give
To such an enterprise? Thou see'st already
The morning dawns; and even yet if night
Here reign'd for ever, these are palace walls;
Speak, then, in whispers: every wall may hide
A spy beneath its shade. Ah let us not
Now lose the harvest of so many vows,
And of so many wanderings, that, at length,
After such danger, to these shores conduct us.

Ores. Oh sacred shores! 'tis true, it seem'd to me,
That unknown powers from you repell'd me back:
Since we from Crissa had our anchor loosed,
The winds seem'd always to forbid my progress
Towards my native shores. New obstacles
By thousands and by thousands always rising;
New perils made me tremble, that the day
Would never come when I should plant my foot
In Argos. But that day at length is come—
I am in Argos. If I have surmounted,
Beloved Pylades, all forms of danger,
To thee, and thy inflexible regard,
Do I ascribe it. Ere I hither came,
The avenger of such infamous misdeeds,
Perhaps to no dubious test the gods would bring
Courage in me, in thee fidelity.

Py. Courage? thou hast too much. How many
times

For thee I've trembled! I am pledged, thou know'st,
Every vicissitude to share with thee;
But, oh reflect, that nothing yet is done
Of what we have to do. We are arrived;

No more. Amid the multifarious means
 To such a task, 'tis fitting now that we
 Inflexibly adhere to one alone,
 And that the best; and that we should resolve
 What pretext to select, with what feign'd name
 T' invent a reason for our coming hither;
 An adequate foundation we should lay
 For such an edifice.

Ores. Eternal justice
Will be our sure foundation. To myself
 That blood is due for which athirst I come.
 The surest means? Behold it in my sword!

Py. Oh youthful turbulence! For blood thou
 thirstest?

Others, defended by a thousand swords,
 Thirst also for thy blood.

Ores. T' appal Ægisthus,
 Already self-appall'd, my name suffices:
 Too potent is my name; and of what temper
 Can he a breast-plate or a shield possess,
 That I can pierce it not?

Py. He has a shield,
 A tough, impenetrable, doughty shield—
 His innate baseness. Round his person throng
 Innumerable satellites; and he,
 Trembling, though safe, stands in the midst of them.

Ores. To announce me, and disperse these satel-
 lites,

Were the same thing.

Py. To announce thee and be slain,
 Were the same thing; and slain by what a death!
 Even these satellites possess a faith
 And courage of their own: they from the tyrant

Draw their subsistence; nor would have him dead,
Except themselves destroy him.

Ores. In my cause
The people then...

Py. Dost hope that in the heart
Of the base people, hatred or regard
Can ever be perpetuated? Spoil'd,
Degraded, now it sees one tyrant fall,
And now another rise; not one it loves,
And yields to all; forgets an Agamemnon,
At an Ægisthus trembles.

Ores. 'Tis, alas!
But too, too true! . . . But thou dost not, like me,
Before thine eyes behold a murder'd father,
Bleeding and unavenged, who asks, expects,
And threatens me to vengeance.

Py. Hence am I
More qualified that vengeance to obtain.
Oh hear me. We to all are here unknown,
And wear a stranger's garb: unquiet tyrants,
Whether from inclination or from fear,
Watch narrowly the movements of a stranger.
Soon as the day-light dawns, and we've been seen,
We shall be dragg'd into Ægisthus' presence.—
What shall we say?

Ores. Strike: in the miscreant's breast
A thousand wounds inflict; and hold our peace.

Py. Camest thou for certain death, or certain ven-
geance?

Ores. Provided both be certain; first to slay,
And then be slain.

Py. Orestes, by our friendship,
And by thy murder'd father, I beseech thee

A little while refrain : for a few hours
Yield to my judgment, I will give the rest
To thy revenge. Rather than with the sword, *Stato*
Baseness should be assail'd by artifice. *while*

Ægisthus should believe us messengers
Sent from my father ; bearers to himself
In Argos, of thy death.

Ores. Belie my name *proceed*
To an Ægisthus ? I ?

Py. Thou may'st be silent ;
Thou need'st not lie, for I will speak for thee.
The imposture will be mine, and mine alone.
We shall perceive th' emotions of Ægisthus
At such intelligence, and shall discover
Electra's destiny.

Ores. Electra ! . . . Ah ! . . .
Much do I fear that she no longer lives.
Tidings of her I never have received.
Ægisthus certainly would never spare
The blood of Agamemnon.

Py. But the wife
Of that Ægisthus is Electra's mother.
Perhaps she has saved her ; and if it be so,
Think that she still is in the tyrant's power ;
And that we might, only by naming her,
Ensure her death. In a far different guise,
Thou know'st that Strophius himself, with arms
And troops, might re-establish thee in Argos ;
But open war, however prosperous,
Would give thee nothing but thy throne and sceptre.
Meanwhile the impious tyrant would escape,
And of his rage (if he has not ere now
Slain her) Electra would remain the victim ;

Thy sole beloved sister; she to whom
 Thou ow'st thy life. 'Thou see'st th' imperious need
 There is for caution. Lofty is thy purpose;
A purpose mightier far than to regain
A throne usurp'd: defeat it not, Orestes.
 Who knows? thy mother perhaps is penitent...

Ores. Ah! speak not thou to me of her.

Py. Of her,
 Nor aught besides.—I only ask of thee
 To listen to my counsel. If thou wilt not,
 Those gods that by thy side have planted me,
 No longer will protect thee.

Ores. I yield all,
 I swear to thee, except the deed of death.
 I will behold the murderer of my father;
 Behold him, nor unsheathe my thirsty sword.—
 Be this the earliest effort of my virtue,
 Oh father, which I consecrate to thee.

Py. Silence; methinks I hear a stealing footstep...
 Behold! a lady in a mourning garment
 Advances from the palace. For a while
 Let us withdraw ourselves.

Ores. She comes this way.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Electra, Orestes, Pylades.

Elec. For once, Ægisthus a short time is absent;
 I now, without constraint, may bring my tribute—
 What do I see! Two youths who, by their dress
 And by their mien, I do not recognise.
 They watch me, and seem strangers.

Ores. Didst thou hear?

Ægisthus' name she mention'd.

Py. Ah! be silent.

Elec. Oh, youthful strangers, (for I deem ye such,) Say; to these walls what brings you?

Py. Let me speak;
Stand thou apart.—Strangers we are, 'tis true;
Here we come bearers of important tidings.

Elec. Are they intended for Ægisthus?

Py. Yes.

Elec. What tidings can these be? . . . Pursue your steps;

Ægisthus now is absent. In the palace
Ye may repose yourselves till he return.

Py. And his return?

Elec. Before the day is spent;
In a few hours, is certain. Thanks and honours
He will bestow on you, as is your due,
If grateful be the tidings.

Py. They will be
Grateful, though perhaps unlucky to Ægisthus.

Elec. How my heart beats!—Unlucky? Are they
such
That I may know their import?

Py. Pardon me.

Thou seem'st to me a lady of high birth;
But that the king should hear these tidings first
Appears to me incumbent . . . By my words
Thou seemest troubled? . . . What? . . . Can any news
Brought from a distant country interest thee?

Elec. Interest me! . . . no . . . But from what land
are ye?

Py. Grecians we are; from Crete we lately came.
But in thee, more than from thy mourning garments,

I, from thy looks, thy gestures, and thy words,
Trace the impression of profound distress.
May I enquire? . . .

Elec. What sayest thou? . . . in me?
Thou know'st that pity in a woman's heart
Is easily excited. Mournful news,
Although it have no reference to myself,
Afflicts me. Hence, though I express'd a wish
For you to speak it, spoken it would grieve me.

Py. Oh gentle-hearted! would'st thou deem the
wish
To know thy name presumptuous?

Elec. To know it
Could not advantage you; and to my grief,
(Since grief thou see'st in me,) to speak my name
Would surely be no solace. It is true,
That, far from Argos . . . some solicitude . . .
Some fond anxiety perchance . . . to me
Might yet have reference.

But, no! I clearly see that your arrival
In no wise is connected with myself.
Yet, when a stranger lands upon these shores,
Involuntary feelings rush upon me;
I feel my timid heart, 'twixt hope and fear,
Fluctuate tumultuously. Yes, I'm convinced
You ought not to reveal to me the purpose
Of your arrival. Enter: I meanwhile
Pursue my pilgrimage to yonder tomb.

Ores. Tomb! what tomb? where? and whose?

Elec. Dost thou not see?
Yonder? Atrides' tomb.

Ores. Oh sight of woe!

Elec. And dost thou shudder at it?

And have the tidings of the horrible death
That he received in Argos reached your ears?

Py. Where have they not been heard?

Ores. Oh sacred tomb
Of the king of kings, requirest thou a victim?
Thou shalt have one.

Elec. What is it that he says?

Py. I heard him not.

Elec. Did he not speak of victim?
And why? Say, is the memory of Atrides
Sacred to him?

Py. Yes: but a little while
His father he has lost; each mournful object
Excites emotion in his pious heart;
Strange fits of phrenzy seize him suddenly.—
Compose thyself, Orestes. Art thou mad?
How can I ever trust in thee?

Elec. His eyes,
Motionless, eager, terrible in aspect,
He fixes on the tomb . . . Oh thou, who art thou,
'Thus generously daring? . . .

Ores. Leave to me
The transport of revenge.

Py. He hears thee not.
Pardon, oh lady, his frenetic ravings.
Regard not what he says: he is insane.—
Art thou determined then, at all events,
Thus to betray thyself?

Ores. Into the traitor,
Time after time, my weapon will I plunge
As many times, as from his horrid wound
Thou shedded'st drops of blood.

Elec. He's not insane.

A father didst thou say . . .

Ores. A father, yes,
Was torn from me. Oh rage! and he remains
Yet unavenged.

Elec. If thou art not Orestes,
Who art thou, then?

Py. What do I hear?

Ores. Orestes?
Who, who invokes me thus?

Py. Now art thou lost.

Elec. Electra calls thee thus.
I am Electra, who, with both my arms,
Thus press thee to my bosom.

Ores. Where am I?
What said I? . . . Pylades, alas! . . .

Elec. Dispel,
Orestes, Pylades, dispel all fear.
I do not feign a name. Orestes, thee,
From thy rapt ecstasy I recognised;
And from my grief, my tears, and my affection,
Acknowledge thou Electra.

Ores. Thou dost live;
Oh sister! thou dost live? and I embrace thee.

Elec. Eventful day!

Ores. And do I clasp thee thus?
What inexpressible delight I feel!
Yet oh, that bitter sight! my father's tomb.

Elec. Be calm a while, I pray thee!

Py. Oh, Electra,
How have I sighed to know thee! It was thou
That saved'st my Orestes, of myself
The better part; think, if I do not love thee.

Elec. And thou hast been his guardian friend : to
me

Thou art a second brother.

Py. Ah ! do thou

Join then thy prayers with mine ; ah, undertake
With me to check the imprudent eagerness
Of that impetuous spirit. To despair,
Orestes, would'st thou drive us ? Every instant
Would'st thou that I fear for thee ? Hitherto,
Pity, love, vengeance, have conducted us
In safety hither ; but if thou art thus
Unguarded . . .

Ores. Pardon me . . . beloved Pylades ; . . .
I was transported . . . what is now thy wish ?
But oh ! what reason e'er could be controul'd ? . . .
What feelings, at a sight so unexpected ! . . .
I saw him,—yes, I saw him with these eyes.
His head he lifted from the sable tomb ;
His fleshless fingers from his face removed
His grisly locks ; coagulated blood
And tears, upon those livid cheeks of death
Stood glistening. Obvious to my sight alone
He was not ; for upon mine ears there fell
A fearful and a melancholy voice,
Whose tones yet vibrate in my inmost heart :—
“ Imbecile son, why dost thou still delay ?
“ Thou art arrived at manhood ; hast assumed
“ Thy sword, and still thy father's murderer lives.”
Oh fierce rebuke ! . . . He on thy tomb shall fall,
Slain by my hands ; his veins shall not retain
A drop within them of his impious blood.
Thou, thirsty shade, shalt quickly drink it all.

Elec. Ah ! calm thy rage. I also often see

My father's squalid spectre stalk around
That gelid tomb, and yet I hold my peace.
At every step, within these palace walls,
Thou wilt behold the impress of his blood,
Yet thou, with dry eyes, wilt be forced to see them,
Till, with fresh blood, they are by thee effaced.

Ores. Electra, how much more than empty words
Would deeds content my heart! But, till the day
For action comes, my anguish I will smother.
Meanwhile, since born to weep, let us at least
Shed tears together. Shall it then be true
What I no longer hoped for? In thy bosom
Shall I shed tears of love, of grief, and anger?
Tidings of thee I long had ceased to hear;
I fear'd that thou had'st fall'n the tyrant's victim,
And rather came prepared t' avenge thy death,
Than thus to clasp thee to my breast.

Elec. I live,
And I embrace thee: this is the first day
In which I have not quarrell'd with my life.
The impious fury of the cruel tyrant,
Stung e'en to madness that he could not slay thee,
Convinced me thou wert living; but, alas!
With how much apprehension did I hear
That thou had'st left the hospitable home
Of Strophius!

Py. Purposely my father spread
Such a report, that hereby, unassail'd
By treacheries of Ægisthus, he might live
In greater safety. I, throughout this space,
Ne'er left him, nor will ever leave him.

Ores. Death
Can alone part us.

Py. No, not e'en death.

Elec. Oh thou unparallel'd and faithful friend !
But now inform me, how will you appear
Before the cruel and suspicious tyrant ?
Here to conceal you were impossible.

Py. We will present ourselves as messengers,
Bringing the tidings of Orestes' death.

Ores. The artifice is vile.

Elec. Less vile than he,
Whose cruelty compels you to deceive.
There is none better or more sure ; but use
Discretion. When you are introduced to him,
'Twill be my care t' adjust for you the whole ;
The time, the place, the mode, the implements
For his destruction. Yet I keep, Orestes,
That sword I keep, which in her husband's breast
She plunged, whom we no longer since have dared
To call our mother.

Ores. Tell me how she fares,
That impious woman ? What life does she lead ?
How does she force thee for the crime not thine
To make atonement, that thou art her daughter ?

Elec. Thou canst not picture to thyself her life.
All would, and ought to, pity it, except
The children of Atrides . . . and perchance
E'en they will be constrain'd to feel compassion.
By terror and suspicion always haunted ;
E'en by Ægisthus treated with contempt :
Loving Ægisthus, though she knew him guilty ;
Repentant, yet perhaps capable once more
Her trespass to commit, if the base flame,
At which she is incensed, and blushes, willed it ;
Now wife, now mother ; yet ne'er wife or mother.

Remorseless thoughts, by thousands and by thousands,
Distract her heart by day; and horrid phantoms
Scare from her nightly pillow quiet sleep.
Behold the life she leads.

Ores. May heaven inflict,
That which by nature we are forbidden to do,
On her a terrible and lasting vengeance!
But yet to-day she must decide to be
Either a mother or a wife; she must,
When at her side, transfix'd by me, she sees
The vile adulterer weltering in his blood.

Elec. Ah, wretched mother! yet thou hast not
seen her;

Who knows the impression that she may produce?

Ores. My father I have heard; and that suffices.

Elec. Yet such a mingled conflict in thy heart
Wilt thou experience, that, against thy will,
Thou wilt be forced to weep, and recollect
She is thy mother. She is still towards me
Indulgent; but the infamous Ægisthus,
Who only spares my life to her entreaties,
Much as he can oppresses me. Yet I
Have hitherto endured his cruel gift,
The day expecting, when I might to thee
Restore the sword stained with my father's blood.
Although a woman, I have oft been tempted
With my right hand to grasp it; but, at last,
Orestes, thou art come, and come in time.
To-day Ægisthus, from himself to banish
My importuning presence, had decreed
My instant nuptials with an abject slave.

Ores. I come unbidden to these impious nuptials,

The gods shall have an unexpected victim.

Elec. My mother, but in vain, opposed.

Ores. On her,

Say, might we aught depend?

Elec. Ah! not at all.

Although she fluctuates betwixt vice and virtue,
To vice she still adheres. When at her side
No more she sees *Ægisthus*, . . . then perchance . . .
Ah then, would be the moment to reclaim her.
She weeps with me, 'tis true, but yet she lives
With the usurper. Do thou shun her presence
Till he return.

Py. Where is the miscreant gone?

Elec. Impious, he spends this day in revelling,
The anniversary of our father's death.

Ores. Oh rage!

Elec. E'en now he's outraging the gods.
Towards Mycæne, in a spot not far
From hence, he offers to the king of hell
Unhallow'd victims and nefarious vows:
It cannot now be long ere he return.
But let our conference cease; within the palace
I will return unseen; t' await *Ægisthus*
Do you still linger in this outer court.
I to thee, *Pylades*, commend my brother.
To-day, *Orestes*, I shall ascertain
Whether or not thou lovest me. I pray thee,
By the remembrance of our murder'd father,
And by that love, be guided by thy friend,
And check th' impetuous ardour of thy nature;
For that revenge, to which we now aspire,
May be, by too much wishing it, defeated.

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Clytemnestra, Electra.

Cly. Leave me, Electra ; go to thy apartments :
I wish to meet Ægisthus . . .

Elec. Ah, my mother !
Art thou already troubled by his absence ?
And fear'st thou, that the thunderbolts of heaven
To ashes have consumed him, as he stood
Before the altar ? Lay aside such fear ;
Heaven hitherto, upon the impious here,
Hath shed perpetual blessings.

Cly. Of Ægisthus
Cease thus to speak.

Elec. 'Tis true, his very name
Blisters the tongue that dares to give it utterance.
Oh ! art thou she, that would'st erewhile with me
Bring secretly an offering to that tomb
Of tears and vows ?

Cly. Cease, cease ; I must go hence.

Elec. To meet the man, whom I have often heard,
By thine own lips pronounced, the instrument
Of all thy woes ?

Cly. 'Tis true : happy with him
I never am ; nor am I so without him.
Leave me.

Elec. At least . . . permit me . . .

Cly. What would'st thou ?

Elec. Ah ! should she meet her son before Ægis-
thus ?

SCENE THE SECOND.

*Clytemnestra.**Cly.* I seek in vain to cheat my weary thoughts.

SCENE THE THIRD.

*Clytemnestra, Orestes, Pylades apart.**Ores.* He never will arrive ?*Py.* Where art thou going ?*Cly.* I love Ægisthus, too, too much ! . . .*Ores.* Ægisthus ?

Who do I see ? 'tis she : I recollect her.

Py. Come here, Orestes ; what art thou doing ?
stop.*Cly.* Who thus present themselves before my eyes ?
Ah ! who art thou ?*Py.* Pardon our hardihood ;
Strangers, perchance we have advanced too far ;
Ascribe it only to our ignorance.*Cly.* Who may you be ?*Ores.* In Argos . . .*Py.* We had not
Our birth . . .*Ores.* Nor from Ægisthus . . .*Py.* To the king
The lord of Phocis sends us . . .*Ores.* If there be
A monarch here . . .*Py.* From hence, if thou permit,
We will advance within the palace gates,
Seeking Ægisthus.*Cly.* What cause brings you here ?*Ores.* A lofty one.

shat. sportive sentences build up
tension, chapped build up to a
violent surging of passion.

ACT THE THIRD.

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Py. And to the king would we
Impart it.

Cly. You may equally to me
Impart it; from the palace now the king
Is absent.

Py. But he will return . . .

Ores. I hope.

Cly. Meanwhile, to me the whole shall be de-
clared.

Ores. To thee will I declare it . . .

Py. Yes, if thou
Insist upon it; but . . .

Cly. Upon the throne
I sit beside Ægisthus.

Ores. All men know
That thou art worthy of him.

Py. The disclosure
Would be to thee less grateful than to him.

Cly. What may it be?

Ores. Why should'st thou fancy this?
What grateful tidings can the husband hear,
Which to his wife were not so?

Py. Thou dost know,
That our unquestionable lord imposed
To tell it only to Ægisthus' ears.

Ores. She and Ægisthus in two bodies are
One soul. *satirical comment*

Cly. And why thus keep me in suspense?
Speak, speak, without delay.

Py. The news to thee
Would be too bitter; and may heaven forbid
That we—

Ores. Thou art mistaken: we

Bring her entire security and peace.

Cly. It is your duty now to put an end...

Ores. Oh queen, we bring thee tidings of the death...

Cly. Of whom?...

Py. Peace, peace...

Cly. Of whom? speak.

Ores. ... Of Orestes.

Cly. Alas! what hear I? of my son?... Oh heavens!

Ores. Yes, of the son of Agamemnon slain.

Cly. What say'st thou?

Py. That Orestes was not slain,
He tells thee.

Ores. Of the son of him that was...

Py. Insane and perjured youth, dost thou to me
Thus keep thy promise?

Cly. Wretched that I am,
Thus of my only son left destitute...

Ores. But, perhaps, Orestes
Was not then the most deadly enemy
Of thy Ægisthus?

Cly. Barbarous! Dost thou
Thus to a mother of her only son
The death announce?

Py. Yet an unpractised youth,
And ignorant of courts, (ah, pardon him,)
Incautiously, with a superfluous zeal,
He, to content thy wish, has mine betray'd.
Such tidings thou should'st afterwards have heard,
With management, imparted by Ægisthus,
And only from his lips; such was my project.
But if, through zeal...

Ores. Perhaps I have err'd ; but now
Thy son is dead, securely with thy consort . . .

Cly. Be silent. Ere I was Ægisthus' wife
I was Orestes' mother.

Ores. Perhaps Ægisthus
Is not so dear to thee as was Orestes.

Py. Thou speakest foolishly ! What art thou doing ?

Darest thou exacerbate a mother's pangs
With importuning and officious words ?
Leave her, and come with me ; time and her tears
Alone can mitigate her grief . . .

Ores. Ægisthus
That grief will mitigate.

Py. Come, let us cease
T' intrude upon her sorrows ; we have made
Ourselves already too unwelcome to her.

Cly. Since in my heart the wound ye have inflicted,
Thou shalt exult in widening that wound,
Hard-hearted youth ! Ah, tell me now, where, when,
And how my son expired. Beloved Orestes,
All that relates to thee I fain would know ;
Nor hear of any thing beside thyself.

Ores. Thou, then, yet lov'd'st him tenderly ?

Cly. Oh youth,
Hast thou no mother ?

Ores. . . . I ? . . . I had.

Py. Oh heaven !
Lady, thy son yielded to fate alone.
His life . . .

Ores. Was not cut short by impious foes ;
No, to repeated and atrocious treason

He did not fall a victim.

Py. Be content
With knowing this. Who could speak to a mother
More circumstantially?

Cly. But if a mother
Insist on hearing more . . .

Py. Ah do thou suffer,
That the sad story be alone by us
Related fully to the king.

Ores. Ægisthus
With joy will hear it.

Py. We have said too much.
Let us depart. Pity forbids us now
T' obey thee.—Follow me. 'Tis fitting now,
At length, that, to my will, thou should'st submit.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Clytemnestra.

Cly. Ah, my unhappy son! . . . thou innocent son
Of an abandon'd mother! . . . Ah, Orestes! . . .
Thou art no more! From thy paternal realm
Banish'd by me, thou diest? Sick, deserted,
And by what death who knows? And at thy side,
In thy last agonies, thou hadst no friend? . . .
No ritual honours did thy tomb receive . . .
A fugitive, unknown, and unassisted,
Oh what a fate for great Atrides' son! . . .
No mother, and no sister, with their tears,
Embalm'd thy livid corse! . . . Beloved son,
Thy mother's hands perform'd not the last office,
Closed not thy dying eyes.—But how I rave!
Were these hands fit for such a function? Still

Impure, and reeking with thy father's blood,
 Thou from thy face, Orestes, and with reason,
 Wouldest have thrust them back.
 O thou, deserving a less barbarous mother! . . .
 But I, for having sacrificed thy father,
 Say, am I less thy mother? Never, never
 Are nature's rights annull'd. . . . Yet had not fate
 In youth cut short thy life, thou wouldest perchance,
 (As a vain oracle predicted once)
 Have turn'd thy sword against thy mother's breast?
 Thy duty this: What other hand so well
 Could punish my irreparable fault?
 Ah live, Orestes, live; return to Argos;
 Fulfil the oracle; in me, no mother,
 But a vile woman, who usurp'd the name,
 Wilt thou destroy: ah come . . . but thou'rt no more.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Ægisthus, Clytemnestra.

Ægis. What groans are these?
 Say, what has happen'd? what new cause of grief?

Cly. Yes, now exult, in tears, eternal tears,
 I have fresh cause of grief: ah, cease to stand
 In tremulous and mute astonishment.

At last, for once thy wishes all are granted;
 That fierce, that terrible, that cruel foe,
 That foe who never injured thee, is slain.
 My only son, alas! no longer breathes.

Ægis. What dost thou say? Orestes? Is he dead?
 Whence hadst thou the intelligence? who brought it?
 Scarce can I think it true.

Cly. Not think it true?

No, no ; improbable thou judgest it,
Since he so often has escaped thy sword.
But if thou'rt not persuaded by my tears,
My fury may convince thee. Even now,
All, all my unextinguish'd love returns
To my maternal heart.

Ægis. Canst thou adduce
No other proof ?

Cly. Proofs thou shalt have enough
To satisfy that ravening heart of thine.
Yes, word by word, *Ægisthus*, thou shalt hear
The dreadful story told ; and at each word
Thy soul will brighten with *Thyestean* joy.
Strangers there are in *Argos* competent
To satiate thy inhuman appetite.

Ægis. Have strangers ventured to appear in *Argos*
Without my knowledge ? Why was their arrival
Not first to me divulged ?

Cly. Does it afflict thee
That thou wert not the first within my breast
To plunge the dagger ? Such a pious deed
Belong'd especially to thee : *Ægisthus*
Should to a wife and mother, and none else,
Such grateful tidings bring.

Ægis. What thus excites,
Lady, thy sudden anger ? Didst thou love
So fondly thy dead son, who, when alive,
Thou scarcely recollectedst ?

Cly. What say'st thou ?
Never did I, no never, cease to be
The mother of Orestes ; and sometimes
If I a mother's love conceal'd, to this
Maternal love impell'd me. I suppress'd
Much of the fondness that my heart conceived,

Towards my son, only that he might be
The less exposed to thy clandestine snares.
Now that he is no more, no more I feign;
Know that Orestes was, and ever will be,
Much dearer than thyself. . .

Ægis. Thou sayest little.

Yet I was dearer to thee than thy fame.

Cly. The fame of her who is espoused to thee
Should not be spoken of. I gave to thee

My fame, my husband, and my bosom's peace;
And of my only and beloved son

The all I gave to thee, except his life.

But thou, impell'd by horrible revenge,

And a corrupt ambition of the throne,

Whate'er I gave to thee, did'st deem a nothing,

While aught remain'd to take. Who ever saw

A heart at once so cruel and so false?

To thy nefarious, ill-feign'd tenderness,

Which I believed in a disastrous hour,

Tell me, ah tell me, was the child Orestes

Ever an obstacle? Yet scarce the pulse

Of dying Agamemnon ceased to beat,

Ere thou didst openly, with threatening voice,

Demand Orestes' life. Thou, frantically,

Exploredst all the palace: then that sword,

Which thou daredst never, with thy infirm arm,

Plunge in the father, bravely thou didst brandish;

Thou wert a hero 'gainst a powerless infant.

He from thy fury was withdrawn: that day

Fully I knew thee; but, alas! too late.

Unhappy son! what did it then avail

That from thy father's murderer thou wert rescued?

A premature death in a foreign land

Awaited thee... Ah, thou hast kill'd my son,
Usurper, parricide; his death is thine!

Ah, pardon me, Ægisthus... pardon me...
I was a mother;... and am now no longer...

Ægis. Provided that Orestes be no more,
Thou may'st indulge in tears and execrations.
Tell me: to whom these messengers first spoke?
Who are they? where did they first land? who sent
them?

Where lodge they? are they heralds from a king?
Why, ere elsewhere their business they proclaim'd,
Did they not ask in Argos for Ægisthus?

Cly. For thee they ask'd: from Strophius they
come:

Unlucky fortune threw them in my way:
All I would hear in spite of their reluctance.
Two, but unlike in character, the men
Are in thy palace lodged. The one refused,
Compassionate and cautious, to disclose
To me the bitter tidings; but the other,
Impetuous, fervid, and ferocious, seem'd
To triumph in my grief: he no less joy
Will feel in telling, than in hearing, thou,
The melancholy tale.

Ægis. But, why to me
Should Strophius now expressly send such news?
He always was th' ally of Agamemnon:
This all men know. Did not this very Strophius
Shelter his son? Lastly, did he not give
To him a refuge in his court?

Cly. 'Tis true,
He did at first; but now for many years
He has from thence been absent: since that time

Of him we heard no more.

Ægis. Fame spake of him ;
But who can know the truth ? Yet 'tis most certain
That from his earliest years he did possess,
As an inseparable guide, and guard,
Defender, friend, the son of Strophius,
That Pylades of his whom I abhor.
In short, towards me Strophius was always hostile :
Whence has he changed ?

Cly. Dost thou not know, by proof,
Now that thou art made a king, what constitutes
A monarch's heart ?—Barbarian, perhaps to thee
'Tis grateful thus t' hear me asseverate
That which cost me so much ? Go, thou hast heard
Sufficient for thy purpose ; go, and leave me.—
Strophius conducive to his interests deem'd
Orestes ; hence withdrew him from thy power ;
Hence welcomed him, and loved him . . . regally :
Hence banish'd him, when useless he became,
Or detrimental ; hence he sends to thee
A prompt ambassador t' announce his death.
Thou in this fashion once thyself didst love me,
Before I slew my husband, and bestow'd
On thee his kingdom ; so thou hatedst me,
When I no more could serve thee ; and so now
Thou dost despise me. Thus are mutable
In monarchs, virtue, honour, faith, and love,
Changing with every tide of chance and fortune.

Ægis. Thou should'st remember that I left to thee
The choice between *Ægisthus* and *Atrides* :
Thou madest the choice. Why then, by endless
taunts,
Constrain me to atone for thy own deed ?

As much as thou deservest it, I love thee.

Cly. Ægisthus, to my importuning taunts
I put an end. Despise me if thou canst;
But never dare to tell me that thou dost so.
If to a crime accurs'd love drove me, think
To what that love when scorn'd, remorse, revenge,
And grief, may drive a woman in despair.

SCENE THE SIXTH.

Ægisthus.

Ægis. Be women heard; they care not for the rest.

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Orestes, Pylades.

Py. The crisis is arrived: we cannot now,
E'en if we would, recede: thou know'st that we
Are summon'd by Ægisthus to his presence.
To us, commanded here to wait for him,
Forthwith he comes; and if thy manners change not,
We also come here to be kill'd, not kill:
I say no more. Be frantic as thou wilt;
I am prepared for death, as well as vengeance.

Ores. Alas! I know that I deserve too well
Rebukes like these: thou lovest me too much:
I was not worthy of a friend like thee:
Ah pardon me. I will restrain myself
Before Ægisthus: that will be, I hope,
Easier to me, than to restrain myself
Before my mother, who appears to me
To have her face, her robe, and both her hands

Discolour'd still with blood. Yes, better far
The hatred I can master, which I bear
Towards a foe, than that commingled conflict
Of pity and revenge, which at the sight
Of such a mother throb'd in every vein.

Py. Who will'd thee to encounter such a conflict?
Not I.

Ores. An impulse undefinable;
Yet stronger than myself. Would'st thou believe it?
At first the thought rush'd irresistibly
To slay her on the spot; in swift succession,
And fierce as rapid, a new wish possess'd me
To clasp her in my arms: and afterwards
Both impulses in strange vicissitude
Assail'd me e'en to madness—fearful state,
And inexpressible as it was fearful! . . .

Py. Peace, peace; Ægisthus comes.

Ores. What do I see?

And with him also comes my mother.

Py. Now

Do thou be silent, or destroy me.

SCENE THE SECOND.

Ægisthus, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Pylades, Soldiers.

Ægis. Come,

Come, oh consort: thou may'st once more hear
Tidings, which even yet I scarce believe.

Cly. Barbarian, dost thou force me to this torture?

Ægis. Let us examine.—Strangers, then to me
The King of Phocis hath deputed you
As trusty messengers?

Py. E'en so.

Ægis. Do ye
Bring certain news?

Py. My lord, a monarch sent us;
We to a monarch speak: can there exist
Suspicion of imposture?

Ægis. But your Strophius
Till now ne'er gave me pledge of amity?

Py. This then will be the first. I can't deny
That he already many years ago
Had different sentiments: he felt compassion
For the unfriended fortunes of Orestes;
But yet, if once he granted him a refuge,
He always strenuously to him denied
Arms and assistance; and against thyself
Strophius would ne'er wage war.

Ægis. Perhaps openly
He dared not wage it. But of this enough.
Where did he perish?

Ores. He!

Py. The Cretan soil
Gives him a tomb.

Ægis. And how, or ere to me,
Was his death known to Strophius?

Py. Pylades
The news bore quickly to his father: he
Was present at the sad catastrophe.

Ægis. To him a destiny so premature
What there occasion'd?

Py. His too youthful ardour.
Every fifth year, in Crete, by ancient usage,
Renews commemorative games and rites
Of festal sacrifice to highest Jove.
Desire of fame, and natural love of pleasure,

Drew to that shore Orestes : by his side
His Pylades inseparably stood.
A warm desire for honour prompted him,
On a light car, within the wide arena,
To seek the noble palm, for rapid coursers :
Too much intent on victory, there he lost,
By gaining it, his life.

Ægis. But how ? Relate.

Py. Too fierce, impatient, and impetuous,
Now with a menacing cry he press'd them forward,
Now with a whip, which, stain'd with blood, he whirl'd,
So furiously he lash'd his ill-train'd steeds,
(Which, in proportion as they were more swift,
Became more mettlesome,) that past the goal
They flew.

Chafed by the reins, and deaf to all his cries,
With which he vainly sought to quiet them,
Their nostrils fire emit ; and to the air
Waved in wild masses their luxuriant manes ;
In a thick cloud of dust involved, and vast
As is the circus, swift as is the lightning,
Through all that amplitude, with all that swiftness,
Backwards and forwards, up and down they flew,
“ Eccentric now, and now orbicular.”

The tortuous whirlings of the chariot bring
Discomfiture, fear, death, on every side ;
Until the fervid axle being driven
With terrible force against a marble column,
Orestes fell o'erthrown.

Cly. Ah ! say no more :
A mother hears thy words.

Py. Ah ! pardon me.
I will not tell thee how, dragg'd by the reins, .

He stain'd the ground with blood... His friend, in
vain,

... Ran to his aid... Orestes in his arms
Breathed the last sigh.

Cly. Oh luckless death!...

Py. All wept for him in Crete; such was his grace,
His beauty, and his courage...

Cly. Tears, alas!

Who would not shed for him, except alone
This infamous usurper? ... Much-loved son,
No more must I behold thee; never more?
But ah! too plainly do I see thee pass
The waves of Styx, and clasp thy father's shade;
Too plainly see you both direct towards me
Th' indignant look, and burn with horrid rage...
Yes, honour'd shades, 'tis I, and I alone,
That am your murderer... Inhuman mother!
Consort most guilty!—Now, Ægisthus, now,
Art thou not satisfied?

Ægis. Thy narrative
Has certainly the character of truth;
That truth will soon be ascertain'd. Meanwhile
Remain within my palace; a reward,
Such as is fitting, ere ye hence depart,
Ye shall receive.

Py. Yes; we will here remain
At thy command.—Come, come.

Ores. Let us depart,
Let us depart; for now I can no more
Refrain from speech.

Cly. Oh thou, who dost relate
The sad event, and not exult with joy,
Ah stay awhile thy footsteps, and inform me,

Why thou hast not to his sad mother brought
The sacred dust of her beloved son
In a funereal urn? A tragical,
Yet welcome gift! to which I have a claim
Before all others.

Py. Pylades perform'd
His obsequies; from the funereal rites
Excluding every one, himself alone
His dust collected, and with tears embalm'd it.
This sad, and last commemorative pledge,
Of the most noble, true, and holy friendship
The world e'er saw, he for himself reserves:
And who would seek to rob him of his treasure?

Ægis. Who would e'en seek to ask him for his
treasure?

Let him possess it: yet a friend so matchless
Claim'd a more signal token of regard.
I am astonish'd, that, with the defunct,
To prove the entire devotion of his soul,
He did not burn himself upon the pyre;
And that one tomb did not contain the relics
Of so sublime, unparagon'd a pair.

Ores. And must I yet be silent?

Py. It is true,
The grief of Pylades caused not his death;
Perchance, his pious fondness for his father
Induced him, though reluctantly, to live.
Sometimes the test of courage it becomes
Rather to live than die.

Ægis. Does Pylades
Detest me then, as much as did Orestes?

Py. We are his father's messengers: he wishes
With Argos to renew a strict alliance.

Ægis. But he's the sire of Pylades : 'twas he
That, as he were his son, received Orestes ;
Defended him, from my revenge withdrew him.

Py. But since he's dead, is not thy rage diminish'd ?

Cly. What was Orestes' crime ?

Ores. That he was son
Of Agamemnon.

Ægis. How darest thou thus ? ...

Py. My lord, ... where doth not fame spread deeds
like these ?

How much Atrides held thee in abhorrence,
All Greece knows well ; and that against thy life
Snæres he contrived ; that thou wert thence con-
strain'd

To watch Orestes. ...

Ores. That thou hast endeavour'd,
A thousand and a thousand times, t' ensnare him
To an opprobrious death, all Greece well knows ;
It also knows, that merely at his presence
Thou would'st have trembled ...

Ægis. What is this thou sayest ?
Who art thou ? Speak.

Ores. I am ...

Py. He is ... alas !

Ægisthus, check thy rage ... he is ...

Ægis. Who is he ?

Ores. I am ...

Py. The son of Strophius ... Pylades.

Nought hath induced him thus to come to Argos,
But a desire to contemplate the spot
That gave Orestes' birth. He hither comes
To weep with his friend's mother. To my care
Strophius committed him : to cause in thee

The less suspicion, in a humble bark
 He came, laying aside all royal pomp.
 He, when he heard Orestes' name pronounced,
 Could not be silent : thus I've told thee all.
 Do not thou deem him criminal, oh king,
 From inconsiderate words ; do not suspect
 That aught, but what I've told thee, brought him
 hither.

Cly. Oh heaven ! And is this Pylades ? Oh come,
 My second son, . . . and let me hear from thee . . .

Ægis. Thy fond protection, queen, avails him not.
 Whoe'er he be, I am not bound t' endure
 Such haughty words . . . But what ! thy ardent look,
 Inflamed with vengeance, thou dost fix on me ?
 And why dost thou irresolutely bend
 Thine eyes upon the ground ? To me ye were not
 By Strophius sent as messengers ; ah no ;
 Ye lie, and ye are traitors.—Guards, in chains
 Bind them this instant.

Pyl. Hear me, I beseech thee.
 And canst thou, from a vague suspicion, thus
 The rights of hospitality defy ?

Ægis. Suspicion ? fraud is graven in thy face,
 And apprehension.

Ores. In thy guilty heart
They are engraved.

Cly. Ah ! tell me : perhaps the news
 May not be true ?

Py. Too true, alas !

Ores. Already
 Tremblest thou lest Orestes should revive,
 Unrivall'd mother ?

Ægis. What audacity !

Some dreadful mystery is conceal'd beneath
These words of thine. Ere thou receivest for them
The punishment thou meritest . . .

Py. Oh heaven !

Ah hear me.

Ægis. I will know the truth. Meanwhile
Bind them with fetters in a horrid dungeon.
Ah ! there can be no doubt ; these impious miscreants
Are creatures of Orestes.—Guards, for them
Prepare the bitterest torments : I myself
Will strictly question them, and from their lips
Learn their designs. In short, I will discover
Whether Orestes be alive or dead.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Electra, Clytemnestra, Ægisthus.

Elec. Orestes dragg'd to death ? What do I see ?
Oh mother, suffer'st thou thy only son
Thus to be haled to punishment ?

Cly. My son ?

Ægis. Orestes ? In my power ? In Argos ? yonder ?
Orestes ? Unexpected joy !—What ho ! . . .

Cly. My son !

Elec. Alas ! what have I said ?

Ægis. Oh run ;

Bring back these youths directly to my presence :
Make haste ; fly, fly : oh joy !

Elec. And I've betray'd him ?

Cly. My son ! If first thou do not murder me,
Fear, monster, fear . . .

Ægis. In Argos, in my palace,
Perfidious lady, dost thou introduce,

And thus conceal, my mortal enemy ?

Elec. They were unknown to her, as well as thee :
Mine was the stratagem.

Ægis. And my revenge
Shall fall on both.

Cly. No ; take my life alone ;
But spare my children . . .

Ægis. Th' infamous remains
Of Agamemnon ? From excess of joy
Scarce can my breast contain my swelling heart.
One blow to-day exterminates them all . . .
But see, the traitors hitherward advance.
Oh most propitious day !

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Orestes and Pylades chained ; Ægisthus, Clytemnestra, Electra, Soldiers.

Ægis. All, all I know,
Excepting which of you may be Orestes :
Confess . . .

Py. I am.

Ores. 'Tis false : I am Orestes.

Cly. Which of you is my son ? This instant speak :
I am to him a shield.

Ægis. Speak thou, Electra ;
And take heed not to lie ; which is thy brother ?

Elec. 'Tis he ; 'tis he, too certainly.

Py. I am . . .

Ores. Believe him not.

¹ Running towards Pylades.

Py. Since the projected plot
Is thus discover'd, let none clothe himself
With my avenging fury!

Ores. If thou dare,
Look on my eyes, Ægisthus, and behold
The fury that burns there; look, and confess,
I am no other than Atrides' son.
Believe this from the terror that my voice,
My voice alone, strikes on thy coward heart.

Ægis. Coward thou art; coward, and traitor too;
And by my hands shalt die.

Cly. Or sheathe thy sword,
Or plunge it in my breast: except through me,
Tyrant, thou canst not touch them. Stop... Oh
heaven!...

Do thou to me reveal thyself, Orestes.

Ah yes; thou, thou art he.

Ores. Go, and elsewhere
Stretch thy ensanguined hands; if we are doom'd
To yield our lives, each of us is Orestes:
If to embrace a mother like thyself,
Neither of us thy son.

Cly. Oh bitter words!...
Yet... thee I cannot leave.

Ægis. See what reward
Awaits thy insane love.—Orestes, yes,
I know thee by thy filial piety.
Of thee, and of thy execrable race,
Thy words are worthy.

Py. Can he silently,
Who is not born from her, endure to hear
A parricidal mother call him son?

Ores. Peace, peace...

Elec. Ægisthus, art thou not convinced,
That this is Pylades; and that he lies
To save his friend? . . .

Ægis. To save his friend? And which
Of you, which shall be saved?

Ores. Ah! if my hands
Were not with fetters bound, by certain proof
Thou hadst now seen whether I am Orestes.
But since I cannot with those hands tear out
Thy miscreant heart, let this attesting sword
Persuade thee who I am.

Py. Rash e'en to madness!
Put up that sword.

Ores. Ægisthus, contemplate
This sword that I conceal'd for thy destruction.
Lady, thou know'st this sword? Thy impious hand
Planted this weapon in my father's breast.

Cly. That is Atrides' voice, his looks, and gestures.
Ah thou art he. If thou wilt not permit
That I embrace thee, in my bosom plunge
That weapon thou; thus in me for thy father
Thou wilt obtain a more consummate vengeance.
While I exist there is no violence
That ever from thy side can sever me.
Oh son! . . . I am a mother yet: I love thee . . .
Ah! come to my embrace . . .

Ores. My sword to thee,
Whom I will call my mother, I resign.
Behold it, take it: thou know'st how to use it;
Plunge it, ah plunge it in Ægisthus' heart.
Leave me to die; I shall die satisfied,
~~If to my father I secure revenge.~~
No other proof of thy maternal love

Would I from thee receive : kill him this instant.
Ah ! what is this ? Thou tremblest !—thou art pale !
Thou weepest !—from thy hand the weapon falls !
Lov'st thou Ægisthus ? Lov'st him, and art thou
The mother of Orestes ? Cursed sight !
Let me no more behold thee : go.

Cly. Alas !...

I die !...

Ægis. This is,¹ this is (and it belongs
To me alone) the sword that slew the father ;
And it shall slay the son. I know it well ;
'Twas mine of yore when stain'd with other blood ;
And to herself I formerly consign'd it.
But perhaps, oh youthful hero, thou art not,
Of all the achievements, perfectly apprized
Of this redoubted blade. Thy impious grandsire,
Atreus, first bathed it in my brothers' blood,
Sons of Thyestes, of his brother. I
Nought else of my paternal heritage
Received : in this were all my hopes reposed ;
And not in vain reposed. Whate'er remains
Of the abominable race, all, all,
I hold within my power. I knew thee well
From the desire I felt to murder thee.
But ah ! can death, e'en in its direst forms,
With that unnatural banquet be compared
To which thy cruel grandsire bade my father ?

Cly. Death to my son !—thou shalt have death
the first.

¹ Taking up the sword, which had fallen at the feet of Clytemnestra.

Ægis. To me thou'rt known; thou also for thyself
Tremble, oh lady, if now . . . From my side
Attempt not to depart.

Cly. In vain . . .

Ægis. Ah tremble.

Elec. Appease thy thirst, *Ægisthus*, in my blood :
I also am the offspring of *Atrides*.
Behold me at thy feet . . .

Ores. What dost thou, sister ?

Py. Mine was the stratagem; like them I had not
A father to avenge; and yet I came,
Yet thee I came to kill: thy cruelty
In me thou may'st securely satiate.
But without risk thou canst not shed in *Argos*
The life-blood of *Orestes*.

Ægis. *Pylades*,
Electra, and *Orestes*, all shall die;
And thou too, lady, if thou do not calm
Thy rage.

Ores. Me, only me. What canst thou gain
By sentencing to death a helpless virgin?
Son of a powerful king is *Pylades*:
And from his death great evil may result
To thee: kill me, and me alone.—Oh ye,
The best part of myself, my friends, I feel
For you indeed my soul alive to grief:
My rash impetuosity hath slain you.
Oh heaven! nought else afflicts me. But to see
And hear *Ægisthus*, and restrain myself,
Was for a soul like mine impossible . . .
So much ye have done to save me, and I kill you.

Ægis. Oh joy! a greater punishment than death
Can I then give thee? Slain before thine eyes

Electra first, then Pylades shall fall;
He then fall on them.

Cly. Infamous . . .

Elec. Oh mother,
Thus dost thou let him slaughter us?

Py. Orestes!

Ores. Oh heaven! I weep! Ah yes; I weep
for you.

Thou, lady, once so bold in guilt, art thou
In reparation so infirm?

Cly. Oh son!

Oh were it possible to free myself
From his compulsive hands.

Ægis. Perfidious woman!

Thou shalt not so escape from my controul.

I now am weary of this waste of words:

Cease, cease to speak. Why should we more delay
To drag them to their death? Go.—Recollect,
Dimas, thy life is of their death the pledge.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Ægisthus, Clytemnestra.

Ægis. Come with me, lady.—Finally, Thyestes,
We do obtain a full, though tardy vengeance.

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE THE FIRST.

Ægisthus, Soldiers.

Ægis. Oh unexpected and disastrous treason!
Orestes freed! We now shall see.

SCENE THE SECOND.

*Clytemnestra, Ægisthus.**Cly.* Alas!

Return: fly back with speed.

Ægis. Ah, impious woman!

Dost thou too rush to arms?

Cly. I would preserve thee:

Ah! hear me: I no longer am...

Ægis. Perfidious...*Cly.* Stop.*Ægis.* Didst thou promise to surrender me
To that vile traitor living?*Cly.* Nay, I swear

From him to rescue thee, although I perish.

Ah, remain here; conceal thyself awhile;

Meanwhile I am thy rampart 'gainst his rage.

Ægis. Arms 'gainst that rage will be a better ram-
part.

Go; leave me. I haste thither...

Cly. Where?*Ægis.* To kill him.*Cly.* Thou goest to certain death. What art thou
doing?

Dost thou not hear the cries and menaces

Of all the people? No, I cannot leave thee.

Ægis. In vain thou wishest from thy impious son
To ward the death-blow. Quit my side; be silent;
Leave me, or I...*Cly.* Do thou, Ægisthus; yes,
Destroy me, if thou canst not trust to me.

“ Orestes !” Hear’st thou ? How they shout, “ Orestes !”

How all around us that terrific name
Sounds like a blast of death ! Ah ! I am now
No more a mother ! If thou art in danger,
’Gainst my own blood my heart once more is hard-
ened.

Ægis. Thou know’st thy sight is hateful to the
Argives :

And if thou now wouldst shew thyself to them,
Their rage thou wouldst redouble. But the shout
Increases. Ah ! thou wert the cause of this,
Perfidious ! vengeance I delay’d for thee,
Which now reverts on me.

Cly. Ah ! kill me then.

Ægis. I will find safety by some other means.

Cly. I follow thee.

Ægis. Ill wilt thou be my shield.

Leave me, depart ; whatever be the event,
Thy presence importunes me. Hence, away.

SCENE THE THIRD.

Clytemnestra.

Cly. All, all renounce me !—Agonizing state !
My son no longer owns me for his mother ;
Nor, for his wife, my husband : yet I am
A mother and a wife. Ah, wretched creature !
I will at distance follow him, nor lose
The traces of his steps.

SCENE THE FOURTH.

Electra, Clytemnestra.

Elec. Where go'st thou, mother?
Within the palace walls do thou return.
Danger most imminent . . .

Cly. Where is Orestes?
What is he doing? Tell me.

Elec. Pylades,
Orestes and myself are all in safety.
Ægisthus' satellites themselves were moved.
"This is Orestes," Dimas first exclaim'd;
Thence all the people: "Let Orestes live,
"And let Ægisthus die!"

Cly. What do I hear?

Elec. Mother, be calm; thou quickly wilt behold
Thy son once more; and with the tyrant's spoils . . .

Cly. Ah cruel! Leave me; hence I fly . . .

Elec. No, no;
Remain: the people shudder, and proclaim
Thee, with loud voice, a parricidal wife.
Be not at present visible; avoid
The great and instant peril that awaits thee:
On this account I came. In seeing us
Dragged on to death, in thee a mother's grief,
All, all was evident: now thou hast made
Atonement for thy fault. To thee my brother
Dispatch'd me urgently, to assist, to sooth thee,
And to withdraw thee from the atrocious sight.
Himself and Pylades, in arms, meanwhile,
In every quarter swiftly run to seek
Ægisthus. Where is he? . . . The miscreant . . .
Where? . . .

Cly. The miscreant is Orestes.

Elec. What say'st thou?

Oh heaven! What do I hear?

Cly. I run to save him;
Or with him to expire.

Elec. Thou shalt not go.

Mother, the people threaten . . .

Cly. Punishment

To me is due, and I will brave it.

Elec. Stop.

The wretch that erewhile dragg'd to death thy children,

Oh, mother, canst thou? . . .

Cly. Yes, myself will save him.

Check not my footsteps: I am overruled

By my accursed fate. He is my husband;

Too much I've lost for him: I will not lose him,

Nor can I lose him. Traitors, not my children,

You I abhor. I will go to him. Leave me,

Thou wretch! At all risks will I go to him:

Ah! may I only there arrive in time.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

Electra.

Elec. Go, if thou wilt then, to thy destiny . . .

Ah! yet I hope that she may be too late.

Why cannot I my right hand with a sword

Arm also, with a thousand blows to pierce

The bosom of the infamous Ægisthus!

Oh blinded mother! how art thou possess'd

By that unworthy wretch! But, yet . . . I tremble . . .

Lest now the indignant people should on her

Take vengeance for their king! . . . Let me pursue
 her.
 But who comes hither? Pylades! and with him
 My brother is not?

SCENE THE SIXTH.

Pylades, Electra.

Elec. Tell me: ah! . . . Orestes? . . .

Py. The palace he surrounds with arms: our prey
 Is now secure. Where is Ægisthus hidden?
 Hast thou seen him?

Elec. I saw, and I restrain'd
 In vain his frantic consort: through yon door
 She darted; saying that herself would be
 Ægisthus shield. He thence was gone before
 From forth the palace.

Py. May he then have dared
 To shew himself to the Argives? At this hour
 He is no more: happy who smote him first!—
 But hark! more near and louder do I hear
 The people's cries.

Elec. "Orestes!" Ah! I hope . . .

Py. Behold, he comes in all his burning fury.

SCENE THE SEVENTH.

*Orestes, Pylades, Electra, Followers of Orestes and
 Pylades.*

Ores. Let none of you now venture in my cause
 To slay Ægisthus: I, and I alone
 Possess the weapon destined to that deed.—
 Ægisthus, where art thou, thou recreant coward?

Ægisthus, where art thou? A voice of death
Calls thee; where art thou? ... Dost thou not come
forth?

Ah vile! dost hide thyself? In vain; to thee
Not e'en the centre of deep Erebus
Shall be a refuge. Thou shalt quickly see
That I am truly Agamemnon's son.

Elec. ... He ... is not here.

Ores. Traitors! ye, ye perchance
Have slain him without me!

Py. Or ere I came
He from the palace fled.

Ores. He hides himself
Within the palace: I will hale him thence.—
Here shall my hand by thy soft tresses drag thee:
There are no prayers, or powers of heaven or hell
That can from me release thee. I will make thee
With thy abhorred carcass plough the dust
E'en to my father's tomb. There will I drag thee,
And from thy veins, e'en to the latest drop,
Drain thy adulterous life-blood.

Elec. Dost thou not
Believe me, brother? not believe Electra?

Ores. And who art thou? I sought Ægisthus here.

Py. He flies.

Ores. He flies! and ye, vile, here ye stand.
Soon will I find him.

SCENE THE EIGHTH.

*Clytemnestra, Electra, Pylades, Orestes, Followers of
Orestes and Pylades.*

Cly. Son, have pity.

Ores. Pity!

Whose son am I? I am Atrides' son.

Cly. Ægisthus is already bound with fetters.

Ores. Does he yet breathe? Oh joy! I go to slay him.

Cly. Oh pause! 'Twas only I that kill'd thy father;

Rather kill me . . . Ægisthus of that crime
Was never guilty.

Ores. Who, who clasps my arm?

Who would detain me thus? Oh rage! Ægisthus . . .
I see him: hither dragg'd he comes . . . unloose me.

Cly. Orestes, know'st thou not thy mother?

Ores. Die,

Ægisthus!—miscreant, perish!—by the hand
Now of Orestes die!

SCENE THE NINTH.

Clytemnestra, Electra, Pylades, Followers of Pylades.

Cly. Ah, see he flies! . . .

'Thou shalt destroy me first.

SCENE THE TENTH.

Electra, Pylades, Followers of Pylades.

Elec. Run, Pylades;

Fly, bring her back; constrain her to return.

SCENE THE ELEVENTH.

Electra.

Elec. Alas! I tremble . . . She is still my mother:

I ought to pity her.—But did not she
 Behold her children erewhile on the brink
 Of an opprobrious death, and did she shew,
 In their behalf, the courage and the grief
 That now she feels for him?—At length the day,
 The wish'd-for day, is come. At length, oh tyrant!
 Thou fall'st a bloody victim.—Once again
 I hear the palace walls rebound with screams,
 As on that horrible ensanguined night,
 In which my father lay a murdered corse,
 I heard it some time echo.—Even now
 Orestes' hand hath dealt the mortal blow;
 Ægisthus falls; the people's loud acclaim
 His death announces. Lo! Orestes comes
 Triumphant: and his right-hand grasps a sword
Reeking with blood.

SCENE THE TWELFTH.

Electra, Orestes.

Elec. Oh come, my brother, come,
 Noble avenger of the king of kings;
 Avenger of my father, and of Argos;
 Come to my breast...

Ores. Sister, . . . behold me now
 The worthy son of Agamemnon. See,
 This is Ægisthus' blood. Scarce I beheld him,
 Ere I sprang forward to destroy him there;
 Nor did I recollect that I had threaten'd
 To drag his body to my father's tomb.
 Within that trembling and effeminate heart
 I plunged and replunged full seven times my sword:
Yet have I not appeased my ardent thirst.

Elec. Did Clytemnestra then to arrest thy arm

Not come in time?

Ores. Who could accomplish that?
 Arrest my arm! I leap'd upon Ægisthus;
 The lightening is not swifter in its course.
 The coward wept; those abject tears of his
 Fill'd me with greater rage. My father! ah,
 A man that dared not die could murder thee!
Elec. My father is avenged; now calm thy spirits;
 And tell me, as thou hither cam'st, didst thou
 Not meet with Pylades?

Ores. I saw Ægisthus,
 Nought else.—Where is beloved Pylades?
 How came it that he did not second me
 In such an enterprise?

Elec. To him, erewhile,
 My mad, despairing mother I confided.

Ores. Of them I nothing saw.

Elec. See, he returns . . .
 Oh Heaven! what see I? He returns alone?
Ores. And sad?

SCENE THE THIRTEENTH.

Orestes, Pylades, Electra.

Ores. Oh wherefore sad, my better part,
 Art thou? Dost thou not know that I have kill'd,
 I, that usurper? See; my weapon still
 Is reeking with his blood. Ah! thou with me
 The triumph hast not shared! Do thou then feast
 Thine eyes upon this spectacle.

Py. Oh sight!—

Orestes, give to me that sword.

Ores. For what?

Py. Give it to me.

Ores. Then take it.

Py. Hear me.—Now

It is no longer lawful in this land

For us to tarry : come . . .

Ores. But what ? . . .

Elec. Ah ! speak :

Say where is Clytemnestra ?

Ores. Name her not :

Perchance she now constructs the funeral pile

For her flagitious husband.

Py. More, far more,

Thou hast consummated than thy revenge :

Now come ; ask nothing further . . .

Ores. Oh ! what say'st thou . . .

Elec. My mother I reclaim of thee, oh Pylades.

Ah ! through my veins what death-like chillness
shoots ! . . .

Py. The gods !

Elec. Ah ! dead perchance ? . . .

Ores. Against herself

Infuriate has she turn'd her sword ?

Elec. Alas ! . . .

Oh Pylades ! . . . thou answerest not ?

Ores. Relate ;

What has befallen her ?

Py. Transfix'd . . .

Ores. By whom ?

Py. Ah ! come . . .

Elec. Thou killed'st her.

Ores. I, parricide ?

Py. The sword thou unawares in her didst plunge,
Blinded by rage, rushing to assault Ægisthus.

Ores. What sudden horror seizes me ! . . . Am I
A parricide ? . . . That sword, oh Pylades,
Give me : once more . . .

Py. It shall not be.

Elec. My brother . . .

Py. Wretched Orestes !

Ores. Who now calls me brother ?

Thou, impious woman, perhaps, who hast to life
Preserved me, and the murder of my mother ?
Restore my sword ; my sword, I say . . . oh rage !
What have I done ? Where am I ? Who constrains
me ? . . .

Who thus pursues me ? . . . Whither shall I fly ?
Where shall I hide myself ?—Oh father, father,
Take from me that stern eye ; quite through and
through

It pierces me . . . Of me thou asked'st blood :
Here, here is blood ; for thee alone I shed it.

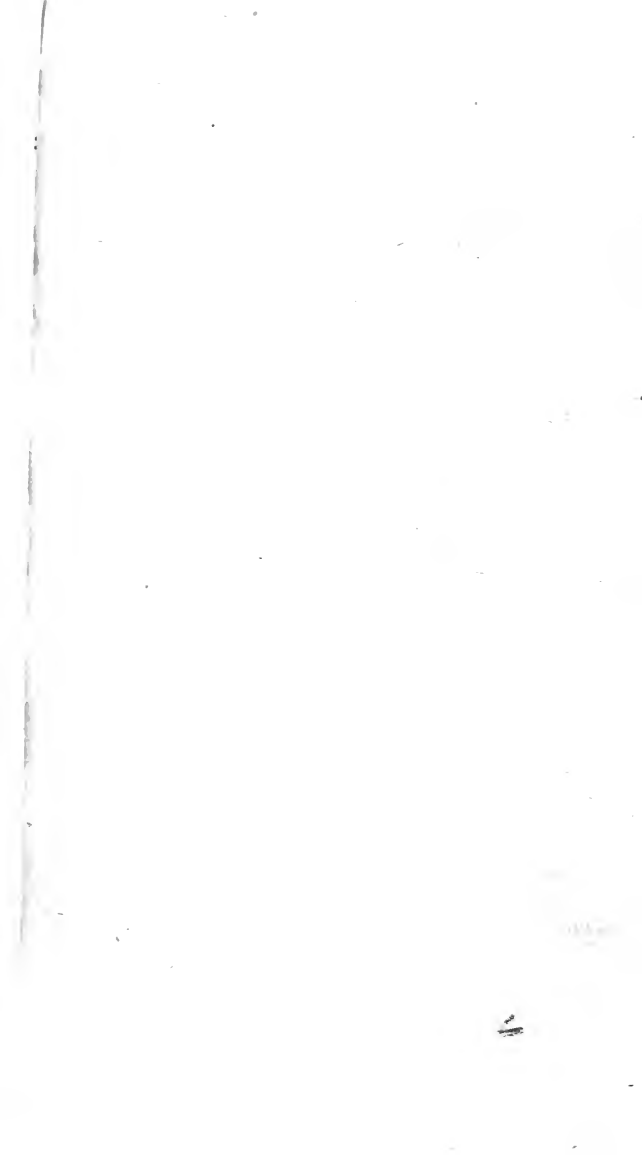
Elec. Orestes, dear Orestes . . . wretched brother . . .
No more he hears my voice ; his sense is gone . . .
Thou, Pylades, and I, will ne'er forsake him.

Py. Oh horrid and inevitable law,
That when we would avenge, perpetuates guilt !

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

EDINBURGH :

Printed by James Ballantyne & Co.





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